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September 2020

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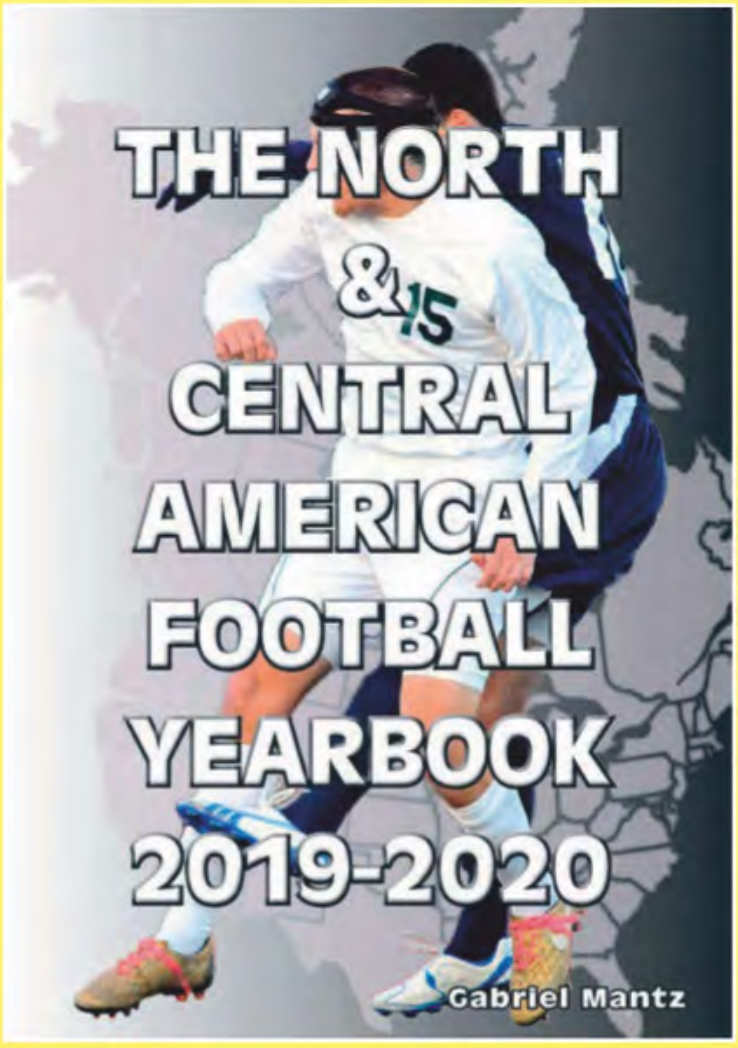

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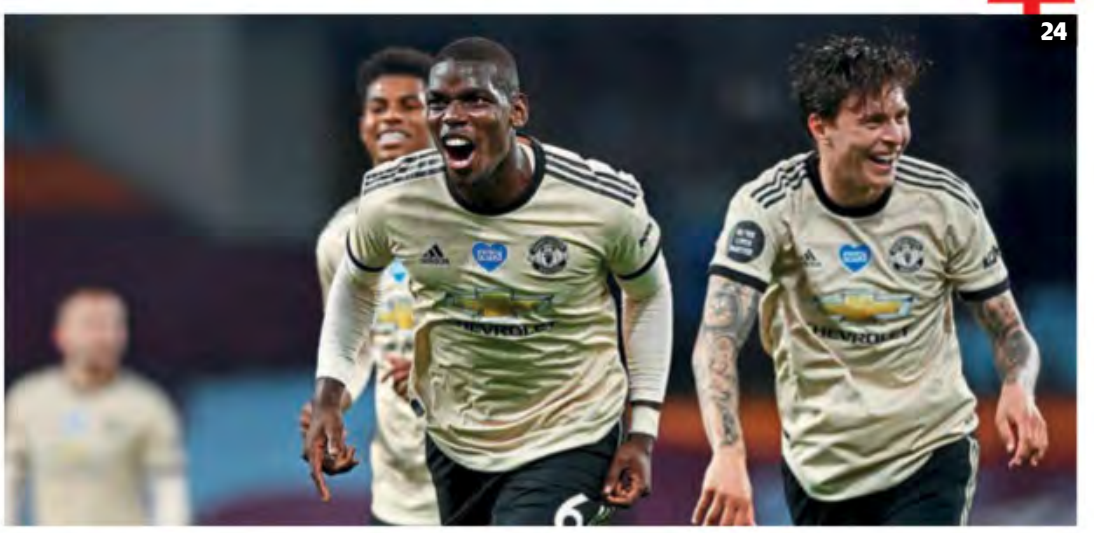

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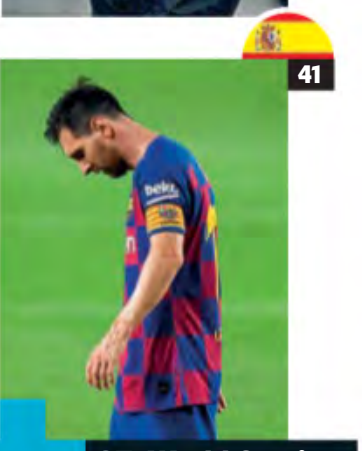

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

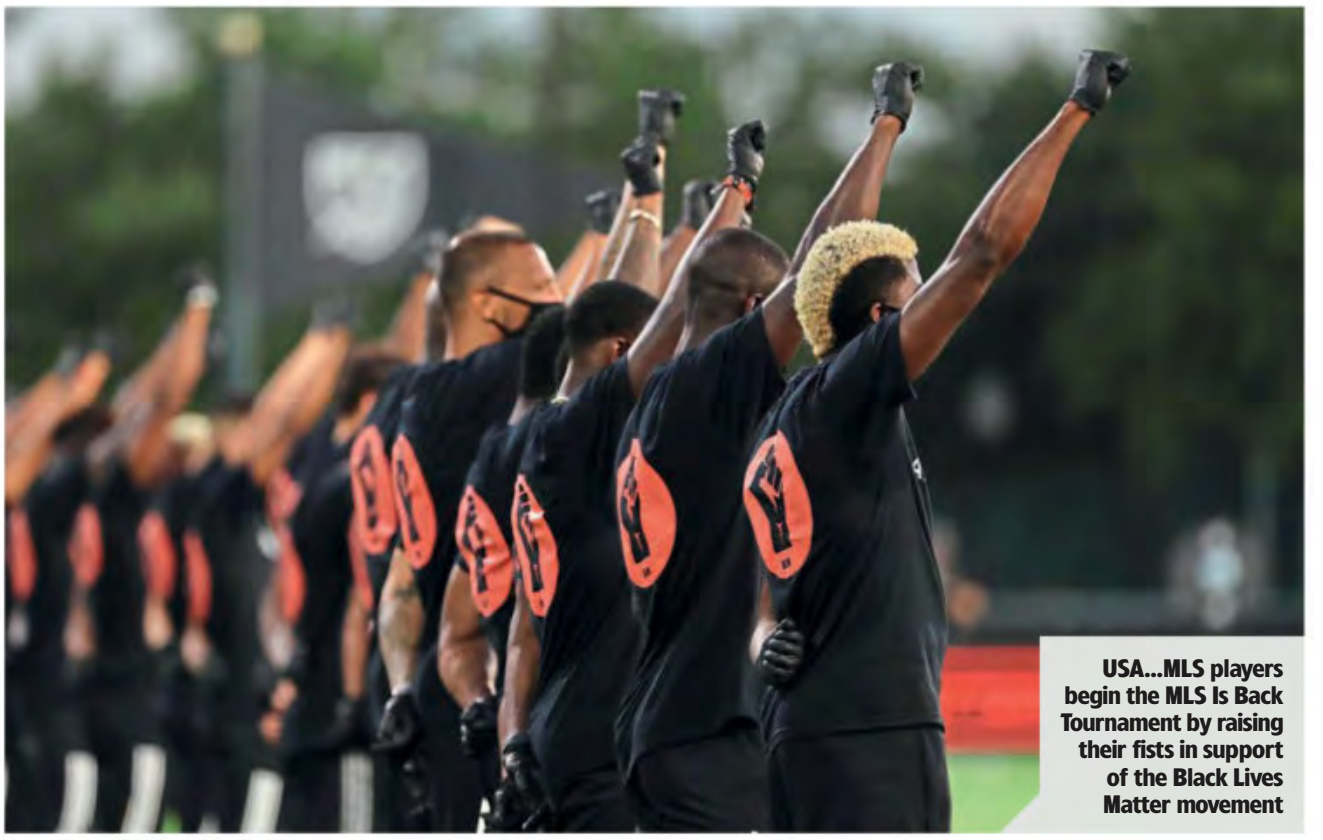
England...Liverpool fans gather outside Anfield, while the players inside the ground lift their first Premier League trophy and fireworks light the sky

Spain...Santi Cazorla says goodbye to his Villarreal team-mates after his final game. The midfielder will join Al Sadd in Qatar this summer

France...fans at the friendly between Caen and Paris FC, in the country's first match in front of spectators since lockdown

Brazil...Flamengo players celebrate winning the Rio de Janeiro state championship, their fourth trophy in the last two years

Portugal...fans of Porto gather on a balcony to watch their match against Tondela, a week before winning the Portuguese league title



USA...MLS players begin the MLS Is Back Tournament by raising their fists in support of the Black Lives Matter movement

Spain...Real Madrid players and coach Zinedine Zidane celebrate winning La Liga

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

So, how was it for you?

Having gone months without football, Europe's major leagues have now been and gone in an intense and relentless flurry of fixtures, with several games a day. Now it's over, all that's left to be decided are the Champions League and Europa League.

UEFA have devised a couple of mini-tournaments, one in Portugal and one in Germany. With this summer's Euros pushed back a year, it should act as a decent stand-in for a major tournament. We've got everything you need to know about the competitions on pages 22-27.

The rest of this issue is dominated by our list of the 500 most important players in the world (pages 42-83). It is not definitive, nor is it about who is the best, but rather a guide to the players that we think you should know about in the upcoming season. Expect some familiar names, and some not so familiar.

Expect some familiar names, and some not so familiar

Finally, we pay tribute to Jack Charlton. The World Cup-winner's football achievements are given a fitting tribute in Keir Radnedge's obituary (page 20), while his warm yet forceful personality shines through in Paddy Agnew's memories (page 28).

Charlton's career was before my time, but it has been a pleasure to read about his achievements and humour. Of the many anecdotes to emerge about "Big Jack", my personal favourite was told by the man himself: "I told them it wasn't about the money, it was about the honour," he recalled of his negotiations with the Irish FA in 1985. "They wrote a number on a piece of paper, put the paper face down on the table and slid it over to me. I looked at it and said: 'It's not that much of a f****** honour.'"

Rest in peace, Jack.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

ENGLAND

Manchester City overturn UEFA ban

The Court of Arbitration for Sport has overturned Manchester City's two-year ban from UEFA competitions, and reduced their fine from €30 million to €10 million.

In their initial verdict, CAS said: "Most of the alleged breaches reported by the adjudicatory chamber of the CFCB [Club Financial Control Body] were either not established or time-barred," adding that although City hadn't been fully co-operative with the investigation, this did not merit a two-year ban.

The ruling, which UEFA are not expected to appeal, is likely to lead to changes to at least some elements of Financial Fair Play. In the immediate future, it leaves City free to compete in next season's Champions League, where they will likely be among the favourites.

Read more on page 36.

USA

Plans for LA's next glamour club

A glamorous consortium of Hollywood stars and tech entrepreneurs are leading plans to create a new women's team in Los Angeles.

"David Silva is a true Premier League great. Have so much respect for him. Admire his character and ability. Genius at work and will miss watching him. Won't miss playing against him whatsoever"

Leicester City's James Maddison heaps praise on Manchester City playmaker David Silva ahead of his departure from the club

Reprieve...City will now be strong contenders for next season's trophy

The city, which already has two men's teams, LAFC and LA Galaxy, currently has no representation in the NWSL, North America's top flight.

But that will change in 2022, with actor Natalie Portman teaming up with venture capitalist Kara Nortman, with funding from Alexis Ohanian – co-founder of website Reddit and husband of Serena Williams – to create California's only professional female club. Also involved are actors Eva Longoria, America Ferrera, Jennifer Garner and Uzo Aduba.

An official name will be revealed before the end of the year, with "Angel City" currently serving as a nickname for LA's first women's team since Los Angeles Sol folded in 2010. They are expected to join in 2022, taking the league up to 11 teams, with Racing Louisville FC joining next year.

LA takeover... actor Natalie Portman

HEROES & VILLAINS

Panenka...Messi reached the milestone from the penalty spot

LIONEL MESSI

By scoring from the penalty spot in Barcelona's 2-2 draw with Atletico Madrid, the Argentinian became only the seventh player in history to reach the landmark of 700 goals for club and country. The list is headed by Josef Bican on 805 goals, and also includes the Brazilians Romario and Pele, Hungary's Ferenc Puskas, and Gerd Muller of Germany, while his old rival Cristiano Ronaldo is now closing in on 750.

JAMES McCLEAN

After their father Thomas died of a heart attack at the age of 29, twins Adam and Aoife received tickets to visit Disneyland from the Stoke City winger. Republic of Ireland international McClean sent a message saying: "I thought I would wish you a big, very happy fourth birthday and I hope you enjoy your surprise trip to Disneyland. Have a good day!"

ANDERS LINDEGAARD

The former Manchester United goalkeeper – who played 29 times during his four-and-a-half years at Old Trafford – scored a 90th-minute equaliser for Helsingborg against Falkenberg. The 36-year-old, who moved to Sweden last year after being released by Burnley, went up for a corner and headed home to snatch a point.

DIEGO MARTINEZ

Promoted last season, the 39-year-old coach led Granada to a seventh-place finish in La Liga this term with a dramatic 4-0 victory over Athletic Bilbao on the final day of the season. The club will now compete in Europe for the first time, entering the Europa League in August's second qualifying round.

Biter...Spaniard Patric is set for a lengthy ban

PATRIC

Seeing Lazio's title hopes slip away was too much for the Spanish defender to stomach. Trailing 2-1 at lowly Leece after surrendering a 1-0 lead, the 27-year-old was shown a straight red card for biting the arm of opponent Giulio Donati in the 93rd minute as his side fell further behind Juventus in Serie A.

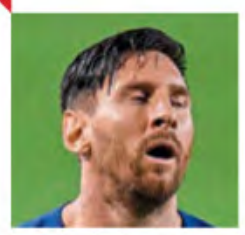
GREEK FANS

The Greek Cup final between AEK Athens and Olympiakos was postponed over fears of organised violence between rival supporters. Police found 18 gasoline bombs and a number of wooden bats hidden near the Georgios Kamaras Stadium in northern Athens where the game was due to take place.

MANUEL NEUER

The Bayern Munich and Germany captain was filmed singing a controversial song while on holiday in Croatia. In the video, he is seen singing "*Lijepa li si*" (You are beautiful), which references an area of Bosnia-Herzegovina claimed by Croatian nationalists. When approached by *Bild* newspaper, Neuer's personal manager said that the keeper does not speak Croatian.

Controversial...Bayern legend Neuer



"We didn't expect to finish in this way, but it sums up the year for us. We are a weak team who can be beaten with intensity and enthusiasm. We have lost a lot of points which we shouldn't have"

Lionel Messi speaks out after Barcelona's defeat to Osasuna hands Real Madrid the title

Victor OSIMHEN

(Lille)

With 13 goals in 27 games for Lille last time out, the Nigerian followed in the footsteps of talents such as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (2013) and Nicolas Pepe (2019) by winning The Prix Marc-Vivien Foe award for the best African player in Ligue 1.

Named in honour of the Cameroon midfielder who died during a Confederations Cup game against Colombia in 2003, the 21-year-old striker finished ahead of Monaco loanee Islam Slimani and Yunis Abdelhamid of Reims in a vote among 100 journalists.

Osimhen is the youngest-ever recipient of the honour and, like Aubameyang and Pepe before him, now looks set to follow the Arsenal stars abroad, with Lille coach Christophe Galtier admitting: "I have planned for some time that Victor will no longer be here next season."

Napoli are leading Liverpool and Manchester United in the race for the €80 million-rated front man, who can play as a central striker or on either flank.

MARIO PASALIC
(Atalanta)
The Croatia midfielder celebrated making his loan move from Chelsea permanent with a hat-trick in a 6-2 thrashing of Brescia.

MOHAMMED KUDUS
(Ajax)
Eleven goals in 25 league games for Nordsjaelland in Denmark this season saw the Ghana midfielder move to the Netherlands for €9m.

HUGO GUILLAMON
(Valencia)
Reportedly on Barcelona's watch list, the 20-year-old central defender signed on for three more years at the Mestalla.

MICHAIL ANTONIO
(West Ham)
The powerful forward eased his side's relegation fears with all four goals in the Hammers' 4-0 victory over Norwich City.

JAMAL MUSIALA
(Bayern Munich)
The England U17 midfielder, who left Chelsea last summer, became Bayern's youngest-ever Bundesliga debutant aged 17 years and 115 days.

ALEJANDRO POZUELO
(Toronto FC)
Ayo Akinola may have scored five goals in his first two MLS is Back games, but the ex-Swansea City midfielder set up four of them.

Paul GARDNER

GLOBAL VIEW

Far from smooth return for football in the USA

Back in March, the coronavirus crisis and the total shutdown of professional sports in the USA was met by Major League Soccer with an imaginative, response. They called it MLS Is Back.

The plan was to assemble all 26 MLS teams at the vast Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. The resort houses the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, a 220-acre sporting Xanadu that includes 17 playing fields, many of them full-size football pitches. The area is also rich in hotels – little used at the moment.

Each team would be isolated within a hotel "bubble", emerging only to get on a bus to take them to the playing fields. No spectators, of course. Game over, the teams would board their bubble buses back to the hotels. Regular virus testing was required of all players.

The risks surfaced at once. Two teams, Dallas and Nashville, were found, on arrival in Orlando, to have over six players already testing positive for coronavirus. Both teams were withdrawn from the tournament, which went ahead with 24 teams, divided into six groups of four.

Group play was scheduled from July 8-23, when the top two of each group, plus the four best third-place finishers would advance to a knockout format.

The three games that each team had played up to that point were to be counted as "regular season games", once the regular season could resume, while the knockout tournament became a separate event with only one prize – the winner would gain automatic entry into the CONCACAF Champions League.

A crucial part of the scheme was that all 51 games of MLS Is Back would be nationally televised on ESPN.

The games began, still suffering from a glitch or two. One early game, with a team on the field ready to play had to be postponed. It was found that neither of the teams involved had undergone the required tests.

Scorching weather didn't help. Even though two breaks per half for drinks were permitted, the dreaded midday sun had to be avoided. The five-substitution rule was much in use. All of which meant that some games kicked-off at 9am, while others waited until 10.30pm to get under way. Another Florida weather specialty – storms with dangerous lightning – delayed one kick-off until 11.30pm.

The tournament opened with several lacklustre, low-scoring games – it seemed that the players, confronted with so many unusual circumstances, opted for caution. The careful mood did not last long. On Day 5, one of the favourites, Sporting Kansas City, were upstaged in a dramatic game that saw 10-man Minnesota storm back to tie the game, scoring a 97th-minute winner.

The following day saw another remarkable comeback. DC United, also playing with ten men, scored twice in the final ten minutes to draw 2-2 with Toronto. The game ended with scuffles, pushing and shoving, yelling and finger-pointing – unpleasant to see, but the fracas brought relief for MLS: teams were taking this synthetic tournament seriously.

Comeback... Toronto's Ayo Akinola has been one of the stars of the MLS Is Back Tournament

Early results did not look good for the supposedly stronger teams. New York City FC, having lost their first two games, were perched on the brink of elimination. Atlanta United were in the same boat. One of their defeats was a spectacularly embarrassing 1-0 loss to Cincinnati, the weakest of MLS teams with only one win in its past 17 games. Current champions Seattle Sounders, with one draw and a loss, hung in there with a 3-0 win over Vancouver.

Another spectacular comeback – this time by San Jose, scoring three late goals to beat Vancouver 4-3 – maintained the excitement level. Los Angeles FC kept up the pace with a sparkling 6-2 win over the LA Galaxy in "*El Trafico*" (the cringe-provoking term used to define the Los Angeles derby). The crunching win affirmed LAFC as favourites to win the tournament.

MLS Is Back had succeeded as a lively tournament. The plan to quickly resume the regular 2020 season remained in place – but clearly, it would involve games without spectators. Coronavirus hovered as an ever-present reminder that even defining "regular season" is no longer straightforward.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Players take the lead in fighting racism

FIFA president Gianni Infantino, like other sports supremos in general, comes in for continuous fire, but he has probably not been given enough credit for a highly unusual response to the Black Lives Matter activism: removing the risk of disciplinary action over any player's gesture in support of protests after the killing of George Floyd.

Floyd's death under police detention in Minneapolis sparked a wave of street protest in the United States and elsewhere in the West.

For football, that was initially adopted by four players when Germany's Bundesliga resumed. Borussia Dortmund's Jadon Sancho and Achraf Hakimi displayed undershirts bearing the message, "Justice for George Floyd"; American midfielder Weston McKennie wore an armband over his Schalke jersey with the handwritten message, "Justice for George"; and Borussia Monchengladbach's Marcus Thuram, whose father Lilian transitioned from World Cup winner with France to anti-racism campaigner, took a knee.

The precedent had been set by Colin Kaepernick, the San Francisco 49ers' quarter-back. In 2016, he refused to stand for the Star-Spangled Banner before one game as a protest against racial injustice, and thereafter knelt at subsequent games. The gesture was later taken up at a National Women's Soccer League match by US women's joint-captain Megan Rapinoe.

It has been highly encouraging to see players take such a lead.

Racism and discrimination in general are evils of society, not a vice particular to football. But the game has stumbled with its own discriminatory attitudes, such as the barriers raised for years against women's football. Far too often governing bodies have used "evils of society" as an excuse for either a blind eye to racist behaviour or a mild slap on the wrist.

Not always even that. The Italian federation has disgraced itself repeatedly by punishing the complaining victims of racist abuse, be it from spectators or opponents. Notoriously in 2003, Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira was also fined £2,300 for criticising UEFA over its pathetic £9,250 fine of Valencia for racist abuse.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, amid great self-serving fanfare, created an anti-discrimination task force in 2013 with CONCACAF president (and FIFA vice-president) Jeff Webb at its head. Time exposed this merely as a vehicle to promote Webb's FIFA presidential ambitions. The task force barely functioned and had been declared moribund long before Webb was banned for life as a FIFAGate mastermind.

In the UK, extremists poisoned crowds in the 1970s and 1980s until being quelled – not eradicated – by a mixture of public appeal, the increase of the number of black players and by the sharp rise in the price of access to the new all-seater, hospitality-rimmed stadia.

Yet the ugliness that was once seen in stadiums now rears its head online. Premier League players Wilfried Zaha and David McGoldrick have both been subjected to racist abuse on social media recently, as was Bristol City's Senegalese striker Famara Diedhiou. Calls for Twitter to take a firmer stance on such abuse from anonymous accounts have so far fallen on deaf ears.

Pressure groups such as Kick It Out have long peered below the single-dimension surface incidents, including the tell-tale absence of black managers and coaches, that signalled that the racism challenge was endemic at governance and administrative levels. Education had to start at the top, not only the bottom.

Hence the promotional example of applying the "Rooney Rule" of consideration for black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates in any shortlist for senior managerial and coaching roles. The English Football League adopted it but not the Premier League. Even the EFL has a side-stepping get-out when a direct appointment is made.

In 2017, UEFA followed its "Prevent" then "No to Racism" campaigns with a

Protest...Premier League players took the knee ahead of every fixture after lockdown

> This summer brought the explosive mixture of the death of George Floyd and eruption of Black Lives Matter into a pandemic-infested football-free void

Sancho...one of the first players to protest

new anti-discrimination strategy labelled "#EqualGame". The theme was positivity, stressing inclusion and accessibility across gender diversity to ageism. Probably too subtle. There has been no let-up in the continuing cascade of fines and stadium closures.

Disappointed president Aleksander Ceferin told Congress in Amsterdam this year: "Many of us have been sickened by what we have witnessed in a number of European stadiums this season. Things need to change. We must begin by applying the rules we already have. That would be a good starting point. We need to do more and perhaps differently."

This summer brought the explosive mixture of the death of George Floyd and eruption of Black Lives Matter into a pandemic-infested football-free void. This was a space into which the racism debate could flourish.

Manchester City's Raheem Sterling launched a social media campaign demanding change from government and sporting organisations. His supporters included the likes of Kevin De Bruyne, Vincent Kompany and Lucy Bronze. All players took a knee on the Premier League's resumption.

This was the backdrop against which FIFA president Infantino sought to seize the time, declaring: "For the avoidance of doubt, in a FIFA competition the recent demonstrations by players in Bundesliga matches would deserve an applause and not a punishment."

The Laws of the Game (Law 4 Section 5) prohibits players from displaying slogans, statements or images on their kit or other equipment that could be deemed as political. A blunt instrument, it makes no differentiation between the poppy insignia of a war-victims charity and an under-vest declaration in support of IS.

Infantino's declaration was risky, throwing open the gates of disciplinary inflexibility to debate, nuance, and grey area – but it was also not before time.

This generation of players have responded. Far more aware of the world they live in than they are often given credit for, the likes of Sterling, Sancho and Thuram are prepared to use their voices in support of a cause that they believe in.

Court catch-up

The tumbrils keep on rolling for the men responsible for so many years of scandal at the apex of world football.

Firstly Alfredo Hawit, once president of CONCACAF, is being deported from the United States after being handed a time-served sentence for his role in the FIFAGate corruption saga. Hawit heads back to Honduras after admitting skimming off $1.6 million in bribes over media rights awards.

Secondly Markus Kattner, former FIFA finance director, has been banned from the game for ten years by the world federation's ethics committee. Kattner, who denied all wrongdoing, had been revealed by lawyers Quinn Emanuel to have taken home around $13m from his contract and World Cup-related bonuses between 2011 and 2015.

Banned...Markus Kattner

Sound of silence

It has been highly enjoyable listening out for the shouts of players, managers and coaches in the temporary world of closed-doors football. In the past, it had been suggested that referees might be kept on an open microphone during games – probably not wise after this trial, and the regular commentators' apologies.

WINNERS

LEEDS UNITED
Heading back to the Premier League for the first time in 16 years after winning the Championship title under Argentinian coach Marcelo Bielsa.

CRISTIANO RONALDO
The Juventus forward became the first player to score 50 goals in Serie A, La Liga and the Premier League.

ISTANBUL BASAKSEHIR
Crowned Turkish Super Lig champions for the first time after beating Kayserispor 1-0 to secure the first major honour in their history.

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA
Champions of Spain in 2000, the club will play in the country's third tier next season following relegation from the Segunda Division.

INTER MIAMI
David Beckham's side were the first to be eliminated from the MLS Is Back Tournament, losing 1-0 to New York City FC as football returned to the USA.

EBBSFLEET UNITED
The Kent club were demoted from England's fifth tier by 0.002 of a point after the National League was decided by points-per-game.

LOSERS

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The case for the defence

For the first half an hour of their visit to Chelsea, the game that would ultimately seal Liverpool's first Premier League title, Manchester City looked comfortable. They passed the ball about slickly, as they had in their post-shutdown wins over Arsenal and Burnley. Watching their mastery of the ball, the cleverness of the interchanges, it was hard to understand how they could be so far behind Liverpool. Then a free-kick was cleared, Benjamin Mendy got in team-mate Ilkay Gundogan's way to present Chelsea's Christian Pulisic with the ball and, having recovered, compounded the error with a rash lunge that the American skipped by easily before clipping a finish past Ederson. That ten-second passage of play exposed most of the problems with City this season.

The expectation at the end of last season was that Jurgen Klopp's side, having achieved the third-highest points total in history and still failed to win the league, would fall away, exhausted by their effort and by the sustained excellence of an apparently implacable City. But Liverpool maintained their level, perhaps even improved, and it was City who faltered.

Second place... Guardiola watches Manchester City's defeat at Stamford Bridge

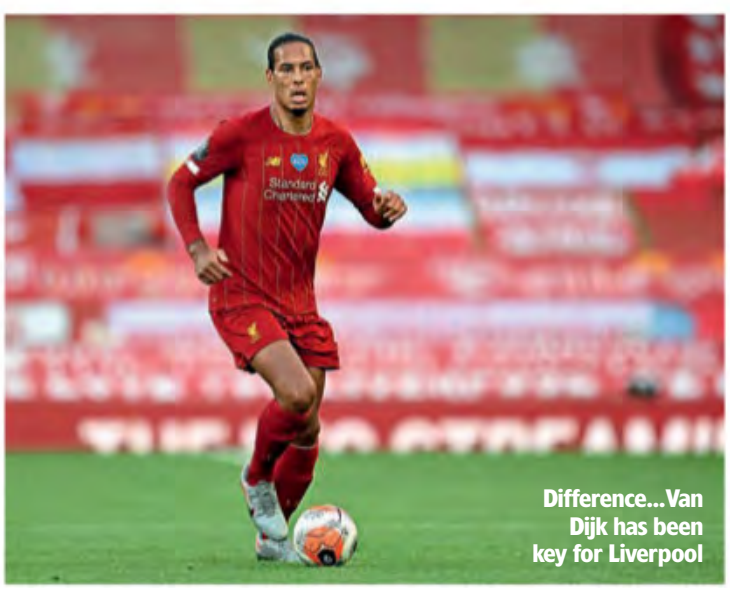
> Jurgen Klopp has realised that an increased focus on defending gives him a competitive advantage

Vincent Kompany left and the form of Nicolas Otamendi and John Stones has remained questionable, issues compounded by a knee injury that kept Aymeric Laporte out for almost five months. That meant Fernandinho having to operate as a central defender, which in turn left Rodri exposed at the back of midfield more often and earlier than was surely intended. Left-back, meanwhile, has been an issue for City throughout Pep Guardiola's tenure: Mendy, blighted by injury, has never entirely convinced; Oleksandr Zinchenko is inexperienced; Joao Cancelo prefers the right; and Angelino was loaned to RB Leipzig. City's problems this season have been almost entirely defensive.

It's a long-standing issue of Guardiola sides that if you can get the ball off them they can be vulnerable defensively. It may even be a flaw inherent in that style, given the need to prioritise ball-playing rather than defensive qualities even in those playing at the back. This has led to the statistical quirk that Guardiola teams will often not concede many goals, only then to concede a flurry in a big game against a high-class opponent; breaking the press is hugely difficult but, once it is broken, a soft underbelly is readily exposed.

But this season has been a little different. Again and again, City have been caught out by simple counter-attacks or balls played in behind them: Norwich did it, Wolves did, Liverpool did it, Manchester United did it and then Chelsea did it.

At the point the title was won, after 31 games, City had scored seven more goals than Liverpool. Vitally, though, Liverpool had conceded 12 fewer. Fourteen of their 28 wins had been by a single goal. Only five of City's 20 had been. That fits with a comment Klopp made after his side's goalless draw with Bayern Munich in the first leg of



Difference...Van Dijk has been key for Liverpool

their Champions League quarter-final last season about the growing importance of defending.

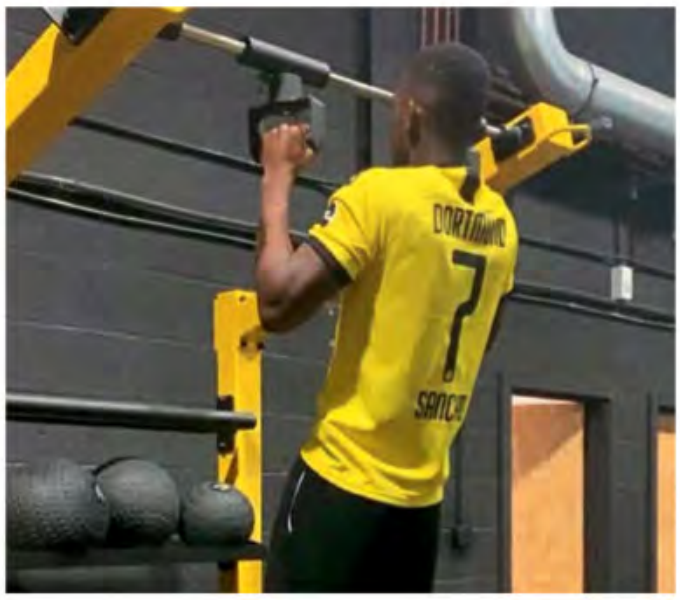
The latter stages of the Champions League in recent seasons have been characterised not only by the quality of the attacking play but by the thrilling nature of the football. To a large extent, that has been because the art of defending has been lost, in part because the super-clubs dominate their domestic leagues to such an extent that they barely have to consider how to shut down their opponents. Defenders are selected for their capacity to pass or cross or shoot, rather than the skills that once would have been traditional for their position: marking, tackling and heading.

Klopp has realised that an increased focus on defending gives him a competitive advantage. Liverpool's two biggest signings have been a goalkeeper and a central defender. Alisson is good with the ball at his feet but is also a supreme shot-stopper, less prone to recklessness than Ederson. Virgil van Dijk, meanwhile, is an excellent traditional defender who happens to be good on the ball and is also a leader; he is to Liverpool what Kompany was to City – and probably has better positional sense. Between December 7 and January 19, Liverpool conceded one goal in 11 matches (excluding the League Cup defeat to Aston Villa when the first team was at the Club World Cup).

This isn't, of course, defending in the sense of dropping deep and withstanding a siege. It's front-foot defending, which in turn is the result of careful analysis. That's why Klopp described the 4-0 win over Crystal Palace, when Liverpool's rhythm returned after lockdown, as a great counter-pressing performance. Although they followed that up by being torn apart at The Etihad, this was a total anomaly that can probably be put down to complacency and a week of celebrations.

The interchanges of the front three and the overlapping full-backs may attract the headlines, but the real difference between Liverpool and City this season has been at the back.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP



Caught...Matondo in Sancho's No.7 shirt

1 GETTING SHIRTY

Schalke winger Rabbi Matondo had to apologise to his club's fans after being pictured wearing the shirt of their biggest rivals, Borussia Dortmund. The 19-year-old says he borrowed the top from pal and Dortmund star Jadon Sancho during a gym session.

"I just want to say how deeply sorry I am to everyone offended and upset by my actions," offered Matondo, who went on to add: "I am very sad and disappointed in myself for letting everyone associated with Schalke down."

2 LUKE WHO?

When Carlo Ancelotti was asked for his reaction to defender Luke Garbutt leaving the club after 11 years' service, the confused Everton manager replied: "Who? I'm sorry, I was not expecting this question. I don't know."

To be fair to Ancelotti, Garbutt had not made a senior appearance for the club for five years and was on loan at Ipswich Town this season, while the Italian only took over at Goodison Park in December.

Former England U21 international Garbutt saw the funny side of it all, and later posted a video of himself in action with the message: "There you go Carlo, look at what your missing @Everton."

3 TRENT FROM ABOVE

One Nottingham Forest fan made the mistake of celebrating too early during July's East Midlands grudge match with Derby County. The fan got so carried away celebrating what he thought was a victory for his team, that he missed The Rams' 97th-minute equaliser – and got himself in deep water.

A tweet from British Transport Police Nottinghamshire read: "Officers attended a report of persons in the canal opposite Nottingham station. A Forest fan had jumped in to celebrate a win over local rivals, unaware of the late equaliser. #wounded."

4 PLAY JUDE

Borussia Dortmund's social media team went the extra mile in announcing the signing of Birmingham City teenager Jude Bellingham. When the transfer was made official, the German side released a video of their players, as well as club mascot Emma, singing The Beatles' anthem, "Hey Jude". In the days leading up to the announcement, they had also been teasing the signing with posts titled, "A Day In The Life", "Here Comes The Sun" and "Yesterday".

5 KANE ABLE TO MAKE HISTORY

With a goal in Tottenham's 3-1 defeat at Sheffield United in July, Harry Kane became the first player to score a Premier League goal on every day of the week and in every month of the year.

Any day of the week...Kane now has over 200 club goals in his career

"He has enormous potential, which we will continue to develop…he already boasts astonishing quality"

Borussia Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc on new signing Jude Bellingham

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Wonderkid…Jude Bellingham

Back in Germany… Leroy Sane

EUROPE

LEROY SANE joined Bayern Munich on a five-year deal from Manchester City for an initial €45 million. Bayern also signed 18-year-old defender **TANGUY KOUASSI** from Paris Saint-Germain.

17-year-old midfielder **JUDE BELLINGHAM** joined Borussia Dortmund from Birmingham City for an initial £25 million.

Internazionale signed **ACHRAF HAKIMI** from Real Madrid for €40 million plus €5 million in add-ons, making the 21-year-old Morocco international, who has been on loan at Borussia Dortmund for two seasons, the most expensive defender in Inter's history.

Former West Ham and Manchester City boss **MANUEL PELLEGRINI** replaced Rubi as coach of La Liga side Real Betis.

Now back in the Premier League, Leeds United turned **HELDER COSTA**'s loan into a permanent move, paying Wolves £16 million for the 26-year-old Portugal winger.

RB Leipzig signed striker **HWANG HEE-CHAN** from Austrian champions Red Bull Salzburg, while defender **BENJAMIN HENRICHS** arrived on a one-year loan from Monaco.

Northern Ireland appointed **IAN BARACLOUGH** as manager, while **GIANNI DE BIASI** took charge of Azerbaijan.

Former Bayern Munich and Croatia coach **NIKO KOVAC** was named boss of Monaco, replacing Robert Moreno. **JEROME ARPINON** took over from Bernard Blaquart as coach of Ligue 1 side Nimes.

Monaco's Belgian satellite club Cercle Brugge appointed **PAUL CLEMENT** as coach.

France U21 striker **AMINE GOUIRI** joined Nice from Lyon for €7 million, while Lille paid Ajax €9 million for central defender **SVEN BOTMAN**.

RON JANS was handed a one-year deal as coach of Dutch side Twente, replacing Gonzalo Garcia.

Having guided Dundee United to promotion to the Scottish Premiership, **ROBBIE NEILSON** stepped back down to the Championship to manage Hearts for a second time. **CALLUM DAVIDSON** took charge of St. Johnstone.

Norway winger **MOHAMED ELYOUNOUSSI** returned to Celtic for another season on loan from Southampton.

ASIA

STUART BAXTER, who resigned as coach of South Africa's national side in August last year, took charge of Indian Super League side Odisha.

Colombian coach **JORGE LUIS PINTO**, who led Costa Rica to the World Cup quarter-finals in 2014, took charge of the United Arab Emirates national team.

Betis boss…Manuel Pellegrini

Coach…Andrea Pirlo

Pirlo's first steps as a coach

A World Cup winner in 2006 and a Serie A champion six times, **ANDREA PIRLO** will take his first steps as a coach when he takes charge of Juventus B next season. The 41-year-old, who is Italy's fifth-most capped player of all time, spent four years as a player with Juve before joining New York City and then retiring in 2017. Juventus B, who are the club's under-23 side, play in the third tier of Italian football.

"The decision matured in me for a long time. The depths became deeper and the highlights less and less"

Andre Schurrle on his decision to retire

Appointments, sackings and loans

Sacked...Nigel Pearson lasted just seven months

EUROPE

- Valencia sacked coach **ALBERT CELADES** after just nine months in charge, while Espanyol dismissed **ABELARDO FERNANDEZ**.
- Former Sheffield Wednesday manager **JOS LUHUKAY** parted company with German side St. Pauli by mutual consent.
- Watford sacked manager **NIGEL PEARSON**, while former England defender **SOL CAMPBELL** parted company with Southend and Bristol City fired **LEE JOHNSON**.

ASIA

- Former England and Liverpool striker **ROBBIE FOWLER** quit as coach of Australian side Brisbane Roar.

Back to England... Robbie Fowler

- Croatia striker **MARIO MANDZUKIC** parted company with Qatari side Al Duhail.
- **LEE LIM-SAENG** stood down as boss of South Korean side Suwon Bluewings.

Bundesliga hitmen hang up their boots

ANDRE SCHURRLE, who won the World Cup with Germany in 2014 and the Premier League title with Chelsea in 2015, retired at the age of 29. He scored 22 goals in 57 games for his country.

Werder Bremen's 41-year-old Peru striker **CLAUDIO PIZARRO** also called it a day after more than 400 games and nearly 200 goals in the Bundesliga. A Champions League winner in 2013, he also won six German league titles with Bayern Munich.

Farewell...Pizarro's team-mates say goodbye

OBITUARIES

BIRI BIRI (1948-2020)
Winger who is regarded by many as the greatest Gambian player of all time, he was the first black player to play for Sevilla.

MARIO CORSO (1941-2020)
A key member of the Internazionale side that won two European Cups, four Scudetti and two Intercontinental Cups, the left winger played 509 games for Inter between 1957 and 1973, and later served as club coach. Capped 23 times by Italy, he was nicknamed "God's Left Foot".

ALEX DAWSON (1940-2020)
Born in Aberdeen, he was a trainee at Manchester United under Matt Busby and scored in United's first game after the Munich air disaster. He later went on to score more than 100 goals for Preston.

KOSSI KOUDAGBA (1995-2020)
Togo striker who passed away not long after helping his country qualify for the now postponed African Nations Championship. Had been the domestic league's top scorer for two successive seasons at ASCK.

Inter legend...Mario Corso

ARDICO MAGNINI (1928-2020)
Serie A winner with Fiorentina in 1956, the defender made 20 appearances for Italy and played two games at the 1954 World Cup.

EMEKA MAMALE (1977-2020)
Midfielder who helped DR Congo to third place at the 1998 Africa Cup of Nations. A nomadic career saw him enjoy spells in South Korea, South Africa and Belgium.

SILVIO MARZOLINI (1940-2020)
Recognised as the best Argentinian left-back of all time, he played at the 1962 and 1966 World Cups. He won five league titles as a player with Boca Juniors and a further league championship with the club as coach.

AHMED RADHI (1964-2020)
Iraq's second-highest scorer of all time with 62 goals in 121 internationals, he scored his country's one and only World Cup goal, against Belgium in 1986. Was voted Asian Player of the Year in 1988.

VLADIMIR SALKOV (1937-2020)
Won the Soviet Cup twice as a defender with Shakhtar Donetsk and later coached the side to victory in the Ukrainian Cup. Led the national teams of the USSR and Uzbekistan.

WIM SUURBIER (1945-2020)
A member of the Ajax side that won three successive European Cups, from 1971 to 1973, and seven Eredivisie titles. A right-back, he was capped 60 times by the Netherlands and was a World Cup runner-up in 1974.

LAJOS SZUCS (1943-2020)
Hungarian Footballer of the Year in 1976, he won a gold medal at the 1968 Olympics and a silver medal at the 1972 Games. Played for Ferencvaros and Honved, and won 37 caps for his country – including playing at Euro 1972.

"Jack was the type of player and person that you need in a team to win a World Cup. He was a great and loveable character. The world of football has lost one of the greats. RIP old friend"

Sir Geoff Hurst on the death of World Cup-winning team-mate Jack Charlton

OBITUARY

Jack CHARLTON

(1935-2020)

Jack Charlton's achievements with the Republic of Ireland as a manager should never overshadow his playing role as one of the main actors on the English football stage for two decades.

"Big Jack" became the third recently departed member of the outstanding Leeds United team of the 1960s and 1970s when he died aged 85, not so long after Norman Hunter and Trevor Cherry. Dementia and lymphoma claimed a man who spent his entire 21-year playing career with the club for whom he made a record 773 appearances.

Giant...defender at Leeds in the 1970s

With Charlton, Leeds won the Second Division in 1964 and the First Division five years later, followed by an FA Cup (1972), one League Cup (1968) and two Fairs Cups (forerunner of the Europa League in 1968 and 1971). He was also the media choice as Footballer of the Year in 1967, and awarded an OBE in 1974, a year after his retirement.

The sum total of those team prizes does not adequately reflect Leeds' dominance of the English game in those years. A machine constructed by manager Don Revie were runners-up more often than they were champions. They also possessed far more ability than detractors allowed.

At the heart of it all was Jack Charlton, a centre-half of personality, significance and commitment. Those individual qualities were never seen to greater effect than in England's World Cup-winning effort in 1966.

Charlton, for all his fearsome tackling and power in the air – which not only saved goals but scored them – was not summoned for national team duty until 1965 when he was 29. He had been considered too rough-and-ready, perhaps even tarnished by outsiders' antagonism to Leeds and Revie.

Years later he spoke about the put-down he received from Alf Ramsey when he joined up for the first time. Ramsey said: "Jack, I haven't picked you because you're the best centre-half in the country because you're not. I've picked you for the balance of the team."

In time Charlton reflected that Ramsey's approach mirrored his own. As he said, self-deprecatingly, about his far-more-lauded brother: "Bobby could *play*. I couldn't play. But I could stop other people playing. In a football team you need both."

The pair shared their achievement as the second brothers to win a World Cup, after West Germany's Fritz and Ottmar Walter in 1954. But they were very different characters.

Mother Cissie, a cousin of old Newcastle hero Jackie Milburn, instilled their passion for the game. Bobby's talent was always obvious; Jack's not so much. Not even to him. Hence he followed father Bob down the pit on

"The word legend is used too much in football, but not for Jack for what he's done domestically with Leeds, winning the World Cup…and the fact he did so well with Ireland"

Ray Houghton, who played for the Republic of Ireland under Charlton

Brothers…Jack with his younger brother Bobby

Winner…Charlton carries Alan Ball after winning the World Cup

leaving school. The awful prospect of a working life underground jarred him into turning seriously to football.

National service helped. Charlton captained his Household Cavalry team while serving in Germany. He returned with renewed commitment to Leeds United and the rest, as they say, is history. Including those 35 all-important England caps (and six goals) between 1965 and 1970.

His last international was against Czechoslovakia in a group match in the 1970 World Cup finals in Mexico. Otherwise Charlton was reserve to Everton's Brian Labone. Would West Germany's Uwe Seeler have scored that spirit-wrenching, close-range back-headed equaliser with Charlton in the team? Would England have then caved during extra-time in that quarter-final?

Charlton was never a man to waste time on ifs and buts. He took his pragmatism into management. His most notable achievement in spells with Middlesbrough, Sheffield Wednesday and Newcastle United was in rebuilding Boro at every level and driving them back up into the old First Division in 1974.

Later came international visibility as the first non-Irishman to manage the Republic of Ireland. Charlton's demand of commitment was writ large all over a team worth far more than the individual parts. The Irish reached the European Championship finals for the first time in 1988, then the World Cup, in which they reached the quarter-finals in 1990 and round of 16 in 1994.

Manager…Charlton at USA '94

His achievements were acknowledged formally by the Freedom of the City of Dublin and honorary Irish citizenship.

But there was far, far more to Jack Charlton than football and a host of entertaining stories. In the words of a family tribute: "As well as a friend to many, he was a much-adored husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He was a thoroughly honest, kind, funny and genuine man. We are thankful for a lifetime of happy memories."

Football is too.

Keir Radnedge

"Xavi will be Barca's coach, sooner or later. But right now we are not looking for a coach, we are with Quique"

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu responds to speculation over Quique Setien's future

Destination Lisbon

It is no exaggeration to say that this season's Champions League has been like no other ever before.

The chaos that the football season has been thrown into by COVID-19 is best demonstrated by the fact that the competition resumes on August 7, the day before preliminaries for the 2020-21 tournament begin. By the time the 2019-20 final takes place on August 23, no less than 20 teams will already have been sent packing and knocked out of next year's tournament.

Once this season's four outstanding last-16 games have been settled, the remaining eight sides will all head to Lisbon for a mini-tournament of straight knockout games to decide the 2020 champions.

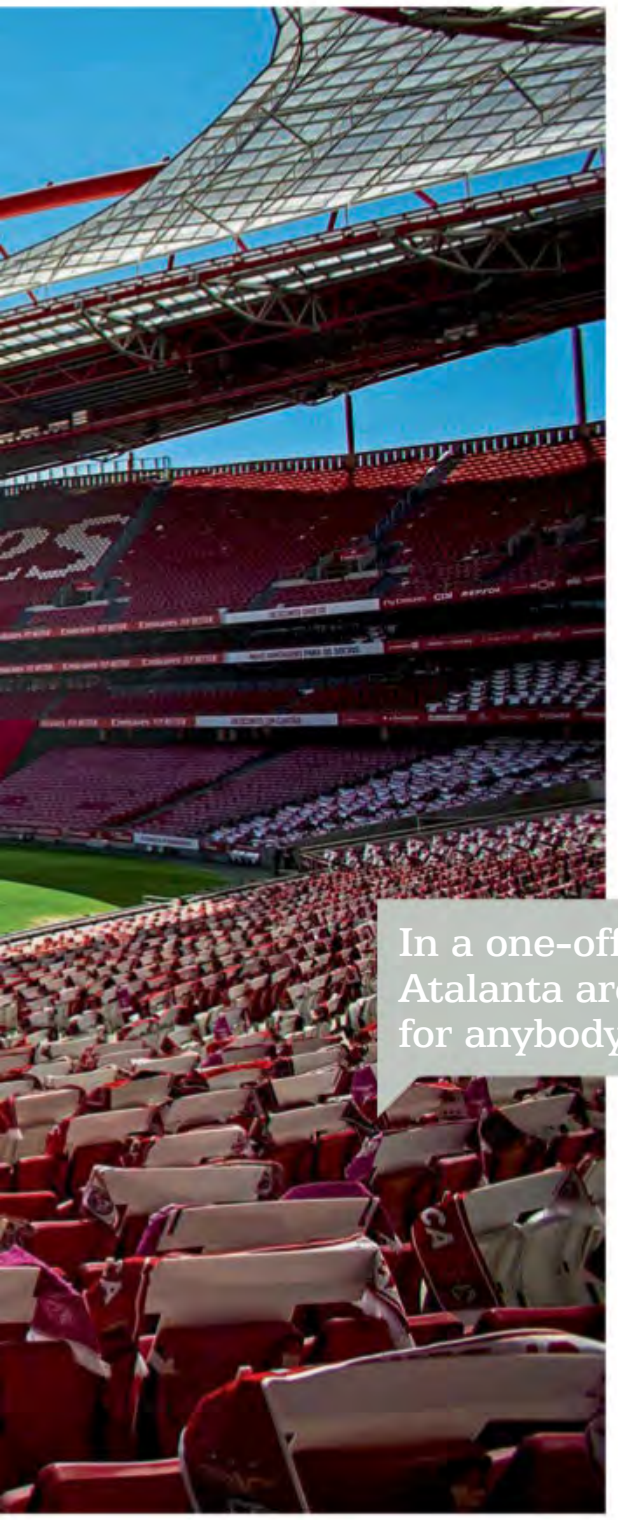
Those games will, of course, be played behind closed doors, but despite the lack of any travelling support, Portugal's close proximity to Spain may well be seen as advantageous by La Liga sides.

Having knocked out holders Liverpool in the previous round with a dramatic goal from Alvaro Morata in time added on at the end of extra time, Atletico Madrid will be confident of making a big impression. Finalists in 2014 and 2016, Atleti will hope that a return to Lisbon will inspire Joao Felix, who has often looked weighed down by expectation since his €126 million move from Benfica a year ago.

They will also draw confidence from the absence of their quarter-final opponents' most dangerous attacker, with Timo Werner having played his last game for RB Leipzig ahead of his move to Chelsea. The Bundesliga side were highly impressive in their dismantling of

"It's hard when you're out for a year, Wesley's been out even longer. I don't see Sneijder making his comeback, I don't see that happening"

Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman doesn't expect Wesley Sneijder to follow Arjen Robben and resume his career



Venue...the Estadio Da Luz, Lisbon

In a one-off game, Atalanta are a match for anybody

Jose Mourinho's Tottenham in the last round, but repeating the trick without their all-time top goalscorer will be difficult.

Barcelona will expect to join Atletico in the quarter-finals when they resume their last-16 tie at home to Napoli, with whom they drew 1-1 in Italy. If they are successful, they will most likely face Bayern Munich, after the Germans' convincing 3-0 first-leg victory over Chelsea. Crowned Bundesliga champions for an eighth successive season in June, Bayern are unbeaten in 2020 under coach Hansi Flick, and are on the hunt for a sixth Champions League title.

Spain's other remaining side, Real Madrid, face a far harder assignment after losing 2-1 at home to Manchester City. City came from behind in Madrid to win with goals from Gabriel Jesus and Kevin De Bruyne, and Real's cause isn't going to be helped by the suspension of Sergio Ramos following his red card in the first game. City, on the other hand have produced some scintillating football since the resumption of the Premier League – particularly in the 4-0 thrashing of Liverpool – and will be buoyed by the lifting of their ban from next season's competition. Pep Guardiola will surely feel that this is his time, nine years on from his last Champions League trophy.

Also trailing from the first leg are Juventus, who lost 1-0 in Lyon, but the Italians will back themselves to overturn the deficit inside their own stadium, just as they did against Atletico Madrid at the same stage last season. Juve midfielder Miralem Pjanic will be available for selection, despite his agreed move to Barcelona (with Arthur going the other way), although it remains to be seen what will happen if the two sides meet in the semi-finals.

One player who won't be taking part is Paris Saint-Germain's Edinson Cavani, after the striker decided to turn down a contract extension in order to look for a new club. The star-studded French champions shouldn't be short of goals, particularly lining up against the leakiest defence left in the competition, but they can't afford to take Atalanta lightly. An incredible 8-4 aggregate victory over Valencia took the Italians into the quarter-finals in their debut Champions League campaign, and the revised structure of the tournament could well suit the underdogs. In a one-off game, they're a match for anybody.

Empty...Valencia v Atalanta was the first clash played behind closed doors in this season's competition due to COVID-19

KEY DATES

All kick-off times 8pm

LAST 16 SECOND LEGS

Friday, Aug 7
Juventus v Lyon
First leg: 0-1

Manchester City v Real Madrid
First leg: 2-1

Saturday, Aug 8
Bayern Munich v Chelsea
First leg: 3-0

Barcelona v Napoli
First leg: 1-1

QUARTER-FINALS

Wednesday, Aug 12
Atalanta v Paris Saint-Germain

Thursday, Aug 13
RB Leipzig v Atletico Madrid

Friday, Aug 14
Napoli/Barcelona v Chelsea/Bayern

Saturday, Aug 15
Real Madrid/Man. City v Lyon/Juventus

SEMI-FINALS

Tuesday, Aug 18
Winner QF 2 v Winner QF 1

Wednesday, Aug 19
Winner QF 4 v Winner QF 3

FINAL

Sunday, Aug 23
Winner SF 1 v Winner SF 2

Champions...who will lift the 2019-20 crown?

"It's a big concern. You need it to build a squad. It's not magic. You need to improve with quality, quality players in the squad and you need bigger squads to compete. There's the challenge"

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta voices his concern over whether the club's owners will invest in big signings at the Emirates

European hero...Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

At the wheel

Can Solskjaer drive the 2017 winners to the trophy?

When the Europa League quarter-finals get underway in Germany on August 10, Manchester United will be favourites to go all the way.

The club sees itself as a Champions League outfit. The presence on the touchline of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer – scorer of that winning goal against Bayern Munich in their dramatic comeback in the 1999 final – is both testament to their glorious history and a reminder of better times.

Their last major trophy came in this competition in 2017, yet that was more significant for providing a route back into the Champions League than the trophy itself. This time things are different.

The 5-0 defeat of LASK in March, which all but secured their place in the last eight, was United's final match before lockdown. At the time they lay in fifth place in the Premier League, three points away from fourth, with Wolves, Sheffield United, Tottenham and Arsenal all breathing down their neck. But they had at last begun to find some form – something had clicked. And after lockdown, that was even more evident with some scintillating displays.

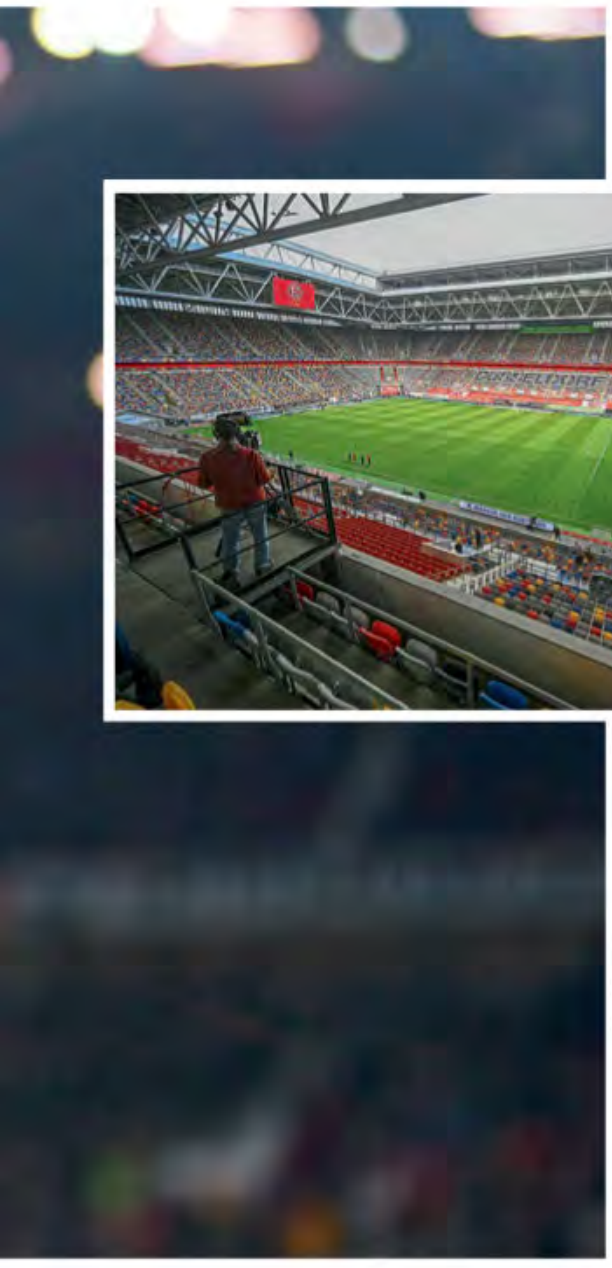
Comfortable...United celebrate beating LASK in March

Winning the Europa League this time around would be viewed differently. Lifting the trophy would be a mark of the progress that the club has made in 2020, and a hint at a return to Europe's top table. Silverware in his first full season will be a tremendous boost for Solskjaer, particularly when comparing his record with those of more celebrated coaches who have been touted as his potential replacement – Mauricio Pochettino, for example.

This was hard to foresee at the start of the year. On January 19, United were beaten 2-0 by their great rivals Liverpool, and three days later suffered the same scoreline at home to Burnley. They were booed off the pitch at Old

"Look, the Russian wants to take Oblak"

Atletico Madrid assistant coach German Burgos speaks bluntly about Chelsea and Roman Abramovich's interest in goalkeeper Jan Oblak



Venues...the Dusseldorf Arena, Stadion Cologne, MSV Arena and Arena AufSchalke

KEY DATES

All kick-off times 8pm

QUARTER-FINALS

Monday, Aug 10
Internazionale/Getafe v Rangers/Bayer Leverkusen
Dusseldorf Arena, Dusseldorf

LASK/Man. United v Istanbul Basaksehir/Copenhagen
Stadion Cologne, Cologne

Tuesday, Aug 11
Olympiakos/Wolves v Sevilla/Roma
MSV Arena, Duisburg

Wolfsburg/Shakhtar Donetsk v Eintracht Frankfurt /Basle
Arena AufSchalke, Gelsenkirchen

SEMI-FINALS

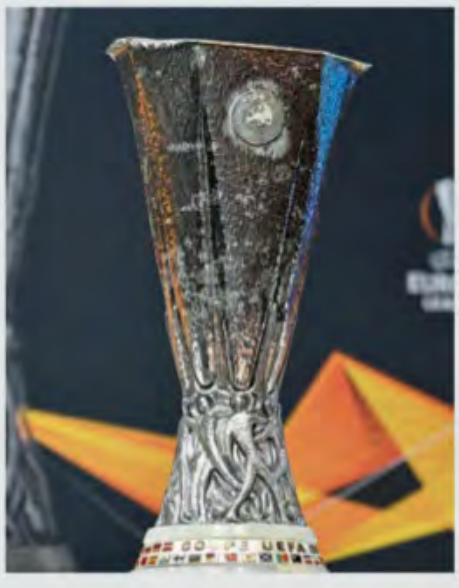
Sunday, Aug 16
Winner QF 4 v Winner QF 1
Stadion Cologne, Cologne

Monday, Aug 17
Winner QF 2 v Winner QF 3
Dusseldorf Arena, Dusseldorf

FINAL

Friday, Aug 21
Winner SF 1 v Winner SF 2
Stadion Cologne, Cologne

Prize...Europa League trophy



Trafford and for Solskjaer, the writing seemed to be on the wall.

Yet the turnaround since then has been remarkable. Following that defeat, they went on a 19-match unbeaten streak – a run which included two victories over Manchester City, another over Chelsea and a draw at Tottenham. They kept 13 clean sheets, while scoring three or more goals nine times.

Central to the turnaround has been the emergence of several key players. Bruno Fernandes has settled in as quickly as his predecessor in United's No.18 shirt, Paul Scholes. The early signs are that his partnership with Paul Pogba will bear fruit, following the Frenchman's return from injury, while the creative potential of the pair has allowed Nemanja Matic to return to his best form as a defensive protector.

Marcus Rashford has made as many headlines off the pitch as on it, yet has easily registered his best season in terms of goals, as has Anthony Martial. The contribution of Mason Greenwood, the top-scoring teenager in this season's Europa League, has made them one of Europe's top scoring trios – notably ahead of Liverpool's famed attack of Mo Salah, Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino.

> Silverware in his first full season will be a tremendous boost for Solskjaer

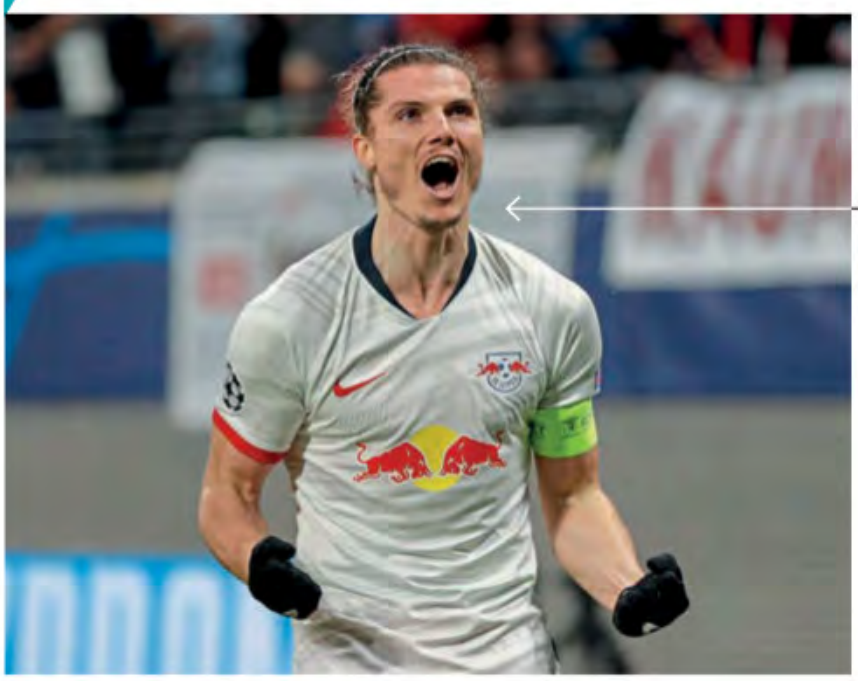
The format should suit them. As with the Champions League, from the quarter-finals onwards this season's Europa League will be staged as a "Super Eight" tournament in a single country, in this case Germany. Speaking after the draw, Solskjaer said: "I'm looking forward to it. It's like a mini tournament. I've been involved in a European Championship and a World Cup so we'll be living tight together abroad. We've got staff here that have been involved in those kinds of tournaments so we'll prepare really well."

In terms of European football, the Norwegian is one of United's most celebrated names. In Germany, he has the chance to add to his legend.

6 of the best

European Ones To Watch

Nich Hills picks out six players to keep an eye on in the remaining Champions and Europa League games



1 Marcel SABITZER
RB LEIPZIG (GERMANY)

With no Timo Werner to rely on in Portugal, some may wonder where RBL's goals will come from when the Champions League mini-tournament gets underway in August.

And the answer to that question could be found in Sabitzer – despite the Austria international being used more as a defensive midfielder by coach Julian Nagelsmann this season.

Of his new role, the 26-year-old told *Sport Bild*: "I had to learn something completely new. I've enjoyed it. But I also think that I have good qualities in the offense, and that's what's best for me."

A striker or No.10 in his early days, Sabitzer certainly hasn't lost his eye for goal, matching Chelsea-bound Werner's four strikes in this season's Champions League, while also ending the Bundesliga season with nine goals.

2 Josip ILICIC
ATALANTA (ITALY)

The Slovenia striker was nicknamed "*La Nonna*" (the grandmother) at Fiorentina due to his constant complaining. But these days Ilicic is a much happier character and his impressive displays have won the admiration of team-mates who now call him "*Il Professore*".

Along with Duvan Zapata and Luis Muriel, he forms a formidable attacking trident for an Atalanta side that has outscored everyone else in Serie A this season. As the 32-year-old told *Sky Sport Italia*: "The older I get, the better I play."

And that also extends to the club's first-ever adventure in the Champions League, where Ilicic scored all four goals as Atalanta won 4-3 away to Valencia in the last round.

3 Thomas PARTEY
ATLETICO MADRID (SPAIN)

The midfielder has admirers all over Europe and further exposure in the latter stages of the Champions League could persuade Atletico to cash in on the 27-year-old.

Although he still has three years left on his current deal, the Spanish club has offered to increase his wages to €150,000 a week if he signs a new contract in which his buyout clause would be doubled to €100 million.

Among those interested in signing the Ghana international are Arsenal, and they were given plenty of encouragement recently when Partey's father, Jacob, told a radio station in his homeland: "Arsenal have lots of followers in Ghana. He'd be happy if he went to Arsenal."

4 Paul POGBA
MANCHESTER UNITED (ENGLAND)

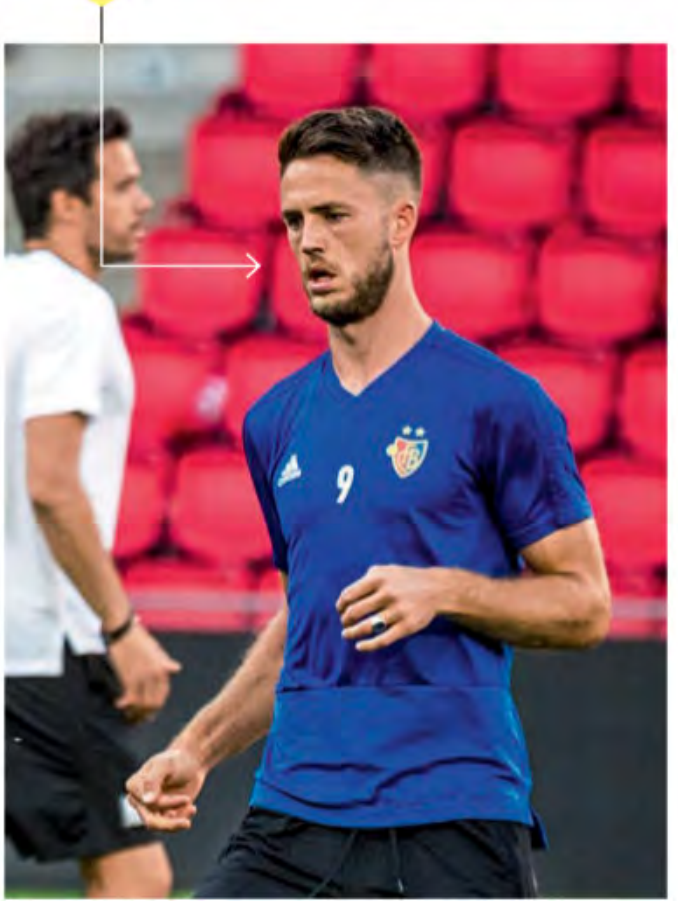
Despite being a World Cup winner and Serie A champion four years in a row, some people still feel the 27-year-old flatters to deceive.

Often accused of being a "flat-track bully" and more interested in his own well being, the Frenchman will doubtlessly be the subject of immense transfer speculation again this summer.

But if the early signs of his budding partnership with fellow United midfielder Bruno Fernandes are anything to go by, the lure of Real Madrid or a return to Juventus could be rejected in favour of establishing a new dynasty at Old Trafford.

Some more silverware to add to his 2017 Europa League medal might go some way to helping keep him at United.

5 Ricky VAN WOLFSWINKEL
BASLE (SWITZERLAND)



Although by no means a first-choice starter these days, the one-time Norwich City record signing has more reason than most to be dreaming of Europa League success this August.

Having missed much of the season following surgery in August for a brain aneurysm, the 31-year-old striker is determined to play his part before his contract expires with the Swiss club at the end of the current campaign.

Capped twice by Netherlands, he says of football's restart: "For me, the situation may be easier than for other footballers. I know what it means to not play for so long. The club has supported me very well. It was a difficult moment when the brain scans first came and I knew I would be out for at least half a year."

6 WENDELL
BAYER LEVERKUSEN (GERMANY)

Leverkusen's sporting director Simon Rolfes says the Brazilian left-back "identifies extremely strongly with the team and the entire club".

Since arriving at the BayArena from Gremio in 2014 the 27-year-old has, according to managing director Rudi Voller, "had some interesting offers in the past, but has always remained loyal to us."

He remains committed and signed a one-year extension with *Die Werkself* in June, but after finishing fifth in the Bundesliga he will need victory in the Europa League if he is to play in next season's Champions League.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Memories of Big Jack

A special, personal tribute to Jack Charlton

The footballing journey of Jack Charlton's Republic of Ireland side in the late '80s and early '90s was an experience unlikely to ever be forgotten by anyone who followed it closely.

Big Jack was of course best known for having starred as a key figure in England's legendary World Cup-winning team of 1966. To win the World Cup was a mighty achievement, the pinnacle of any player's career.

Irish fans, however, would probably argue that in leading Republic of Ireland to their first European Championship finals in 1988 and to their first World Cup finals in 1990, Jack the manager more than matched his achievements as a player. What is for sure is that Jack was the kingpin in an unforgettable moment for Irish football.

As a journalist, I followed Republic of Ireland's progress at the 1988 European Championship in Germany, at the pre-Italia '90 training camp in Malta, and of course at the 1990 finals themselves. My favourite memory of Jack, however, does not concern any of these momentous occasions.

Rather, it concerns a September 1993 World Cup qualifier between Albania and Spain, played in Tirana. Republic of Ireland had been drawn in a tough seven-country group, which also featured Albania, Spain, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania and Northern Ireland.

By September 1993, we were down to the last three group games and qualification for the World Cup finals in USA was hanging in the balance of a three-way battle between Republic of Ireland, Spain and Denmark. When the Spanish travelled to Albania for their away qualifier, they arrived in the then dramatically impoverished East European country to be greeted with a consignment of sports equipment as a "good will gesture". Cynical hacks and others began to smell a rat.

So it was that *Irish Times* sports editor Malachy Logan dispatched me from my Rome base to Tirana. When I got there, I found that both Big Jack and then Denmark coach, Richard Moller Nielsen, were also there for the game. Given that both Republic of Ireland and Denmark still had to play Spain on the last two group days, this could have been just a normal scouting mission.

Fans...Lansdowne Road during a World Cup qualifier in 1989

The problem was that, on the night, Albania appeared to offer little resistance. After just four minutes, a ball bounced off an Albanian defender straight to the lanky Barcelona striker Julio Salinas in the six-yard box and it was already 1-0. With half an hour played, the game was well and truly buried, with Spain leading 3-0. In the end they romped home to a 5-1 win.

After the game, I went to what passed for the press room to find Jack. To my surprise, there he was sitting on a chair on his own in the middle of a concrete space in a distinctly Spartan, Soviet-era stadium foyer. This was the press conference, except that, given that there were only Albanian, Spanish and a few Danish reporters at the game, Jack was not exactly submerged with questions. So, I asked him the obvious question:

"Jack, that game frankly looked fixed, no?"

"You – f*** off", came the thunderous answer that indicated that my press conference with Jack was over before it had begun.

In those days, there was only one hotel in central Tirana. So, it was not difficult to find both Jack and Moller Nielsen later that night. Jack scowled at me in the hotel lobby and told me to come back next morning when he would have time to talk.

Hero...Pat Bonner saves a penalty v Romania at Italia '90

Sure enough, next morning Jack sat down with me in the lobby and talked freely. He reprimanded me for asking such a dumb question publicly after the game (he was probably right). Of course it was a fix, or at least dodgy, he said, but I cannot go saying things like that on the record – imagine the row it would start. He added that he had spoken with Moller Nielsen, who had shared his "doubts" about the game, but who would most definitely not be saying so publicly.

Then he changed the subject. Knowing that I was based in Italy, he asked me about Paul Gascoigne, then in his second season at Lazio. Jack had signed Gascoigne for Newcastle United and given him his first-team debut in April 1985. "I do not know what the Italians make of him," he said, "but he is simply the most talented footballer you will ever see."

World Cup...saluting the Irish fans after being knocked out of Italia '90

Blessed...the Irish team meet the Pope in Rome

Revenge...Ray Houghton scores against Italy at USA '94

In the end, of course, Spain beat both Republic of Ireland and Denmark in their last two games to win the group, with Ireland taking second place by the narrowest of margins. Both sides had finished on 18 points, with almost identical records in which only the number of goals scored divided them.

In the end, too, Jack and I sat on in the lobby chatting. Jack always had questions for you. When I first interviewed him in 1988 in a Dublin hotel, he wanted to know why I had gone to work as a journalist in Italy.

When he and the Irish team arrived for their training camp outside La Valetta, Malta on the eve of Italia '90, Jack was curious to find me already there waiting for the team to arrive. I explained that I had come out a week earlier from Rome for Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to Malta and then I had waited for him – two big birds with one stone, I joked. Jack laughed and immediately asked questions about what the Pope had done, where he had gone, what he had said and so on.

In the early days of "Jack's Army", the Irish press used to stay in the same hotel as the Irish team (hard to imagine now, but that was the way it was). Thus it was that on the eve of that historic 1-0 victory over England in Stuttgart at Euro '88, we hacks had a grandstand seat for the team's final training session.

> "Where are you f****** going, Ray? No, not there...No, you hang back..."

It had been decided that rather than climbing into the bus to travel to the nearest professional ground, it would be handier for the team to have their session on a training pitch adjacent to the hotel. So we stood on our room balconies as Jack bellowed at Messrs Houghton, McGrath, Moran, McCarthy, Whelan et al.

Jack was often criticised for his dull, direct, long-ball approach with Republic of Ireland, an approach that made the team hard to watch but even harder to play against. Some concluded that he was a poor coach. Wrong.

Watching him that afternoon in Stuttgart, he looked pretty damned effective. I recall that he rehearsed some very precise situations. It went something like this:

"Now, there are ten minutes to go, we're 1-0 down but we get a corner. So, Aldo (John Aldridge) is right in the box... but where are you f****** going, Ray (Houghton)...No, not there...No, you hang back..."

And so on in a stentorian voice that brooked no dissent. It might have been basic but it was being thoroughly prepared. And the next day, of course, that Ray fellow scored just about the most important goal in the history of Irish football.

Next evening, too, the entire team squad plus friends, relatives, bemused hotel guests and even the hacks all sat around the bar for the father and mother of a singsong, with Jack sitting in the middle, grinning ear to ear.

The last time I met Jack Charlton was in Rome in 2008. He had come out to make a documentary, *Italia '90 Revisited*, with Brian O'Flaherty. He was older and some of the memories were no longer quite clear in his mind.

However, when we went up to the Stadio Olimpico where Republic of Ireland had been beaten 1-0 by Italy in a quarter-final tie 18 years earlier, he started to recall that night – the Donadoni shot on goal, the Bonner save and the Schillaci tap in. As we walked along the side of the pitch, it was as if being in that evocative stadium again rekindled in Jack the memories of one of the most unforgettable nights in Irish football.

While he was out in Rome, I arranged for a meeting between Jack and Roberto Donadoni who, at that time, was the Italy coach, preparing for that summer's European Championship finals in Austria and Switzerland. Two of the major protagonists of that 1990 quarter-final would meet again.

Antonello Valentini of the Italian Football Federation kindly organised a little presentation of medals and pendants for Jack, given to him by Donadoni, by way of recognition for his great contribution to football. Jack loved that elegant gesture. He was genuinely grateful to the federation for having treated him with such respect and kindness.

Jack himself was a respectful and kind man – dour, blunt, intimidating even, but utterly genuine. May he rest in peace.

Coach...taking training in 1995

James Nalton reports

USA

Community FC

Football takes the lead as Minneapolis tries to rebuild

Minneapolis City Soccer Club are all about action – whether on the pitch in the shape of their successful National Premier Soccer League (NPSL) team, or off it through their work in local youth soccer and the community. They are a club whose valuable actions speak as loudly as their important words.

This is a rarity in North American soccer, where franchises are often built around the marketing of a brand and the hope that supporters will buy into it. Minneapolis City turned this on its head, going to the supporters and the community first and building a club from there.

This ethos has helped them through the recent turbulent times in the city of Minneapolis, where they have still been able to play their part despite the cancellation of the 2020 NPSL season.

"Our member-driven ownership model has attracted the kind of people who are into the community, the action and the local efforts that are our DNA," says co-founder Dan Hoedeman.

"It's the community, and that includes players, staff and supporters, who are donating money, time and effort to the club. It's the community that made the club financially viable in 2020 despite us losing our season. And it's the community that keeps us going right now with our efforts to help South Minneapolis. We're not shut down, we're busier than ever!"

It's for this reason the club found itself uniquely placed when the city of Minneapolis entered a moment of turmoil following the death of George Floyd and the issues already arising on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to a community effort, this uncertainty turned into a solidarity that reverberated around the world. It's a local unity that stems from the club's natural ties with those South Minneapolis neighbourhoods.

The club shop, housed in a modest, quaint-looking building in the city's Standish area, was used as a base for clean-up efforts and food drives. "When COVID-19 hit, our fans lined up behind the club and kept it fiscally sound," says Hoedeman. "And now, with what has happened in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, we find ourselves raising money for impacted business, doing food drives and pop-up pantries for neighbours who don't have access to food, and cleaning up the city.

"We're just a soccer club so we understand that our role in making the world a better place is limited, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't do everything we can."

> "In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, we find ourselves raising money for impacted business, doing food drives and pop-up pantries for neighbours who don't have access to food, and cleaning up the city"
>
> Club co-founder Dan Hoedeman

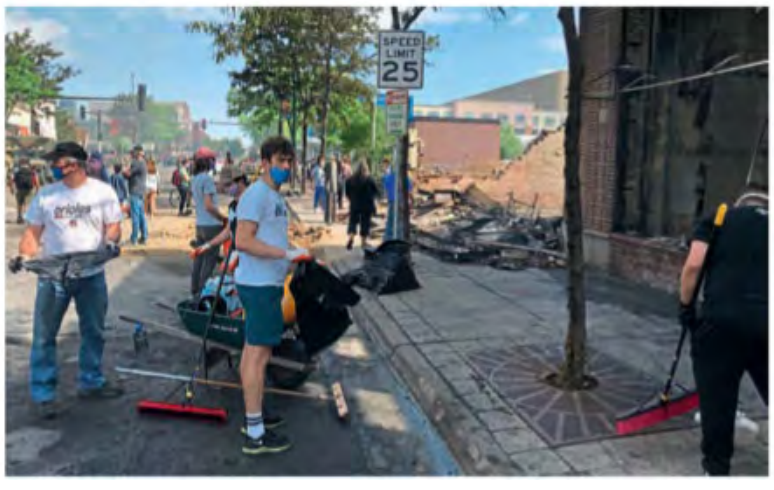
Football has taken hold in these communities, even if it hasn't attracted a national profile in the way some baseball, American football, ice hockey and basketball teams in the area might have. Its obvious potential has motivated groups of like-minded individuals to push the sport forward, and this has produced several teams throughout the years.

The Vikings of the NFL and Major League Baseball side the Twins both boast a higher national profile than the region's soccer clubs, but the average attendance at MLS outfit Minnesota United is now above that of the Minnesota Wild ice hockey team and the Minnesota Timberwolves NBA side.

When football has managed to organise itself in the city, it has been well supported. The now-defunct Minnesota Kicks boasted average attendances of over 30,000 during the 1977 and 1978 NASL seasons, while Minnesota United's NASL predecessor won two trophies and averaged crowds of over 8,000 in the three years prior to joining MLS, where they now regularly attract capacity crowds close to 20,000 per game.

Organisation has always been a stumbling block for football in the US, which means Minneapolis City's decision to build from the ground up, using the strength of the local community and, in turn, making it stronger again, makes lots of sense.

The club brand themselves as "un-corporate soccer". Indeed, it's less a brand, more a natural growth from football roots that have existed in the city since the 19th century. This emphasis on community facilitated the



Clean-up...MCSC have played an active role in cleaning and rebuilding Minneapolis after the protests over George Floyd's death

United...MCSC celebrate with their fans

Local lads...the club only picks Minnesota-based players

Photos Credit: Daniel Mick

club's involvement in the city's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has meant they are often among the first to react to a crisis. They have been able to take such an active role because the club are the community — and that isn't just a marketing slogan.

These principles also extend to local players and youth football. As a non-profit organisation, Minneapolis City are in a position to provide help to those in the area who might otherwise struggle to get into football due to the costs involved.

"We were founded by a group of people that expressly wanted to create a community soccer club," Hoedeman adds. "One that was run by regular people, that helped elevate local players, and worked to recruit players from beyond the typical pay-to-play development academies and suburban mega-clubs.

"We've done free clinics, we've worked with Minneapolis Parks to do free play time in underserved neighbourhoods, and worked with organisations like [youth mentoring organisation] Big Brothers Big Sisters and others.

"We are an all-volunteer club, so everyone involved is doing this by choice and they are emphatically putting their money (and time, and sweat, and effort) where their mouth is. It's incredible. And it's more important than ever, because together we can make this moment one that makes our city a better, fairer place."

At street level, the city of Minneapolis is undergoing a rebuilding process, quite literally in many areas, and its spirit and unity is growing as a result. On a sporting level, away from franchise football, something more organic is building from the grassroots. Minneapolis City are involved in both efforts. They are built to emerge on the other side of a crisis and to help others do the same.

Face to face: Dan Hoedeman

Co-founder...Dan Hoedeman

How important has the club's ethos been in light of recent events in the city?
Nobody, least of all us, expected anything that 2020 has brought. Despite everything that has happened, we find ourselves in a place to help. It starts simply. We don't treat fans like "Brand Ambassadors" or revenue streams to be maximised. When we take action, we take it as a club: players, staff, fans, all together. So when COVID-19 hit, our fans lined up to help.

How has the club's work laid a foundation for the most vulnerable in these communities prior to recent events?
On the one hand, we're just a soccer club. On the other hand, there is power in bringing people together across generations, ethnicities, and socio-economic classes in a positive environment where we are working toward a common goal. Our part was small, the fans did the hard work, but we helped to raise awareness, raise money, and that makes a difference. We want to do more, and I know that we will. Right now, it's a lot of small steps. But we are moving in the right direction. Our fans share that desire to make a difference. We've had donations for our food drive, over 100 volunteers sign up for a pop-up pantry, and vocal support in spreading the word. It's been overwhelming, and shows what a group of regular people can achieve if they work together.

How have lower-league clubs such as yourselves been affected by the coronavirus crisis?
Our season was cancelled, and our U.S. Open Cup first-round match was postponed a week before we were to leave, so we paid all of the expenses like indoor training facilities, hotels and kit, and then didn't play the game.

We were lucky though. We offered refunds to our supporters for their season ticket, and less than 2 per cent of our members took the refund. The rest turned it into a donation. Many of our players donated money as well. And, by dumb luck, we had done a kit launch before COVID that was really successful. The people carried the club through, and we'll be back stronger in 2021. Not all clubs are that lucky. Some have a higher cost structure, others don't have the supporters we do, and still others have owners whose other businesses, which make the soccer club possible, are badly impacted. Clubs lose a lot of money every year even when they're playing.

Food drive... donations at the club shop

How does the restrictive structure of the US league system, with no promotion or relegation, affect the club's ambition?
We believe that promotion and relegation would make a massive difference in US soccer, but while that remains a pipe dream what drives us forward are the things we haven't done at this level. For example, we may have won the conference, but we haven't won the post-season tournament. We have a crazy history with the U.S. Open Cup and are keen to make our mark on that stage as well. That said, there does come a point when you get a little wistful about what could be. There is no real pyramid here so the leagues are all fractured and there are a number of clubs we want to play regularly, and who we know want to play against us, but we're in different leagues. It's a ridiculous situation. It holds us all back.

Could you describe the context of the club's place in the NPSL?
The league is broken into geographically close conferences of teams. We play in the North Conference, which makes up teams from Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and western Wisconsin. The top two finishers in conference move on to the regional play-offs. The Midwest region has clubs from Indiana, eastern Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and upstate New York. The regional winners (there are four regions) have a knockout tournament to determine the national champion. We've won the North Conference the past two seasons. There are and have been fantastic clubs in the league. Especially the past two seasons where we have seen professional outfits like New York Cosmos, Miami FC, Detroit City FC and Chattanooga FC. It's especially heartening to see how we have done given our people-powered club and only Minnesota-based player approach. We went toe-to-toe with the big guns and showed we belong.

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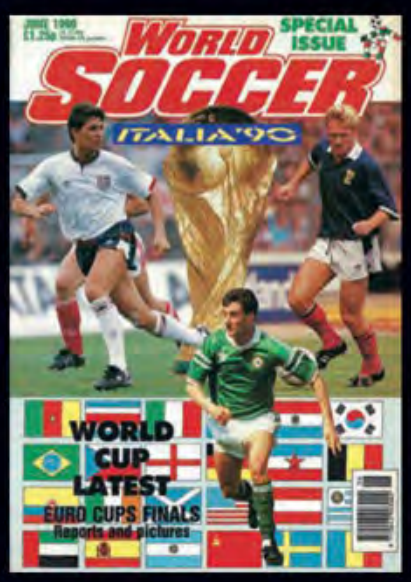


ON SALE NOW

Manchester City

Question marks over FFP's future after Manchester City's successful appeal

The blue half of Manchester breathed a huge sigh of relief on July 13, when the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) overturned their two-year ban from the Champions League. Fans could now relax: Pep Guardiola would not leave, Kevin De Bruyne and other stars would not be tempted away, and the progress that the club has made over the last decade would not be halted.

The spotlight instead will now turn to UEFA, and the future of its policy designed to restrict irresponsible spending – or, depending on your point of view, protect the elite status of the continent's wealthiest clubs.

UEFA accused City of artificially inflating their sponsorship income, yet the CAS ruling stated that: "Most of the alleged breaches reported by the adjudicatory chamber of the UEFA Club Financial Control Body were either not established or time-barred." In other words, the evidence brought forward by UEFA was out of date. The regulations state that Financial Fair Play (FFP) cases should be brought forward within five years, yet most of UEFA's evidence concerned the period of 2012 to 2016. That which wasn't out of date was insufficient to uphold the original decision.

UEFA argued that City's failure to co-operate – for which they have been fined €10 million – meant that the time limits could be ignored in this instance. CAS disagreed.

The verdict says as much about UEFA's flaws as an organisation as the failure of FFP. *Sky Sports* pundit Gary Neville said: "It's no surprise that in a serious court Manchester City have won this case because UEFA are an organisation that simply cannot organise their own disciplinary measures."

In principle, FFP still has its supporters. When asked about the verdict, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said: "I don't think it was a good day for football – I think FFP is a good idea. It's there for protecting teams, protecting the competition. I really hope that FFP stays."

La Liga president Javier Tebas agreed: "We all know what City do. We all know they're trying to find a way around the FFP rules. City will be in the Champions League next season because the CAS did things badly, not because City have done things properly."

> "City will be in the Champions League next season because the CAS did things badly, not because City have done things properly"
> **Javier Tebas, La Liga president**

The financial implications of COVID-19 meant that tweaks to FFP would be required anyway. UEFA has already decided financial statements for 2020 and 2021 will be rolled up into a single accounting period, but more drastic changes could follow.

While the policy still has its advocates, confidence in UEFA to correctly implement it is severely damaged. In the aftermath of the verdict, Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho summarised the confusion around the situation: "In any case, it's a disaster. I'm not saying Manchester City is guilty. I'm saying if you're not guilty you don't pay. Even with a pound. I think it is going to be the end of Financial Fair Play because there is no point."

Staying...manager Pep Guardiola

Meanwhile, City have come out fighting, and will continue to drive the case against FFP. Manager Pep Guardiola insisted that the club deserves an apology now that their innocence has been proven, while also taking a swipe at the eight Premier League clubs who wrote to UEFA in March urging them to implement the ban.

He added: "The elite clubs have to

Favourites...City won 2-1 at the Bernabeu back in March

Thiago Silva

PSG skipper seeks new challenge

Europe calls... City can now partake in the competition for the next two seasons

understand we deserve to be here."

This, ultimately, is the heart of the debate. City believe that the allegations against them are nothing to do with fairness, but designed to prevent them upsetting the apple cart of Europe's elite. Their owners see no reason why they should be prevented from spending in order to bridge the gap to Europe's established order.

UEFA, on the other hand, point to the significant reduction of debt across European football in the last few years, and believe that implementing FFP has made the game far more financially sustainable. Its abolition would encourage more reckless spending, and invite more billionaire takeovers of clubs, like those seen at Chelsea and Paris Saint-German, as well as Manchester City.

This verdict is the latest chapter in the long-running saga between Manchester City and UEFA. The boos that still ring out around the Etihad Stadium when the anthem is played ahead of Champions League ties are unlikely to stop any time soon.

Jamie Evans

After eight years, seven Ligue 1 titles and numerous Coupe de France and Coupe de la Ligue victories, Thiago Silva is leaving Paris Saint-Germain in August – whether or not he adds a first Champions League trophy to that impressive haul.

Due to turn 36 in September, the central defender is set to say *au revoir* to the French capital in August, but admits he is not yet ready to return to his homeland and boyhood club. As he recently told Brazilian news outlet *Caras*: "Everyone knows the affection I have for Fluminense, but I still have goals to reach in Europe."

One of a number of PSG players who were out of contract at the end of June, Silva – unlike his fellow South American, the Uruguay striker Edinson Cavani – happily agreed to a two-month extension so he could skipper the side when the Champions League quarter-finals begin.

But those who know Silva best say he would definitely have signed on for longer if he had been asked and that he was "disappointed and saddened" to be leaving PSG. According to French radio station *RMC*, one such source said of his upcoming departure: "He loves PSG, he loves Paris, he sees it as heart-breaking, this decision, for him and his family.

"This season, he felt great before COVID-19. He was hungry and, even though he is 35, he is very fit and he has a hard time understanding this decision."

However, sad as he may be to go, there will be plenty of new suitors ready and waiting to greet him with open arms. And they will be delighted to be picking up for free a man who became the second-most expensive defender in the world, behind Rio Ferdinand, when joining PSG for €42 million in 2012.

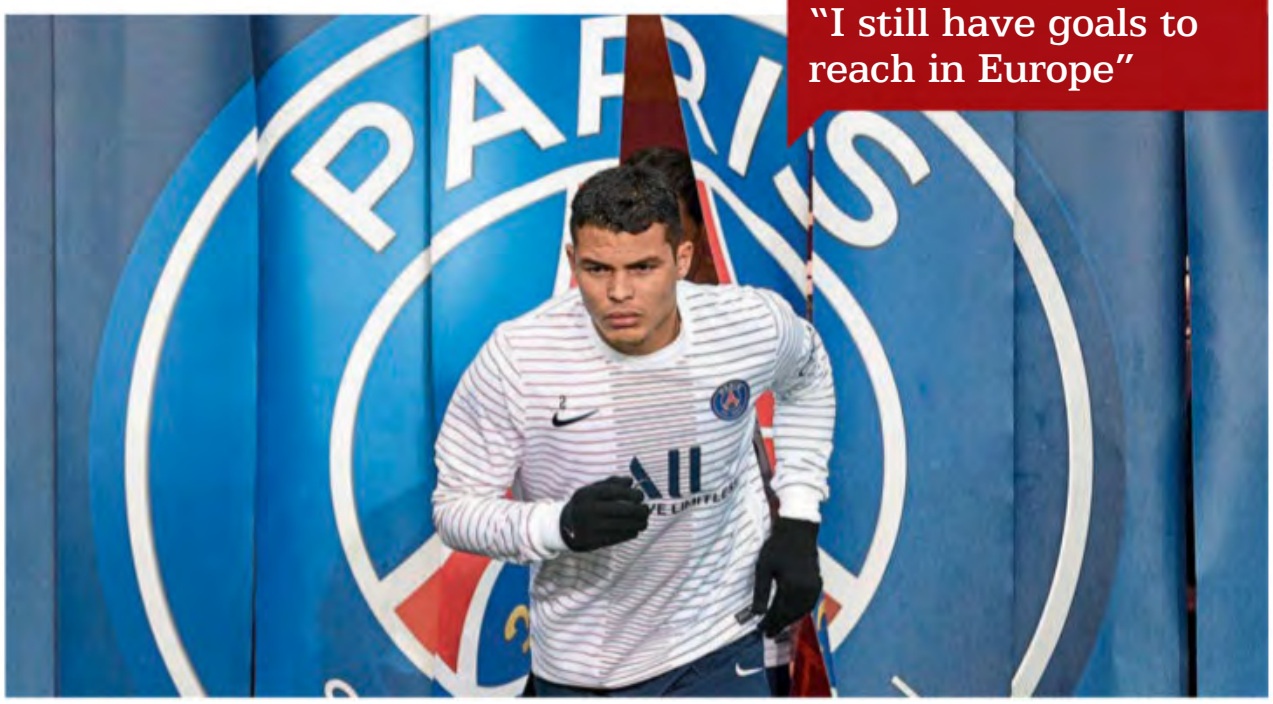
Despite his advancing years, Silva still has plenty to offer. In the season just finished, he topped the Ligue 1 chart for passing accuracy, with a 95.5 per cent success rate, and led his side to the league title, two domestic cup finals and the last eight of Europe's top club competition.

The news that he is also willing to take a substantial drop on his current salary, believed to be over €350,000-a-week, will not have gone amiss in these financially uncertain times. Arsenal were one of the first clubs to make their move, with manager Mikel Arteta said to have already made contact.

In fact, it has even been suggested, if somewhat tongue-in-check, that the year-long contract extension handed to the Gunners' haphazard Brazilian defender David Luiz was done simply in an attempt to help lure his fellow countryman to North London.

Nich Hills

Departing...the curtain is coming down on Thiago Silva's PSG career



"I still have goals to reach in Europe"

Pape Gueye

Watford caught up in contract dispute over French midfielder

Watford were probably feeling pretty pleased with themselves on Wednesday April 29, having just announced the signing of French Under-19 international Pape Gueye on a five-year deal. Already captain of Ligue 2 side Le Havre, the 21-year-old's contract with the club where he'd spent the previous eight years was due to expire, and he'd been free to negotiate with other parties since January.

So far, so normal. Two days later, though, on Friday May 1, word started coming out of France that something was amiss. A French lawyer, Pierre-Henri Bovis, claimed that he was representing the player's interests and announced in the French sports press that while it was true that Gueye had signed a pre-contract with Watford back in January, he had now uncovered "possible irregularities". These irregularities, claimed Bovis, were related to the timing of negotiations between the two parties. "The player was free to sign a contract from January 1, 2020, but he was not free to enter into discussions in the preceding months. We have uncovered certain elements that could suggest discussions with Watford took place before January 1."

These original negotiations had been conducted by Gueye's former agent, Bakary Sanogo. The player had sacked the family friend sometime around the end of March, voicing concerns that Sanogo had been acting more in his own interests during the negotiations with Watford than in those of the player.

The plot thickened further when rumours emerged that Gueye had not only signed a pre-contract with Watford on January 15 (which was legal), but had also signed two other pre-contracts, one with an Italian side, and one with a Spanish side. Apparently, though, both had been inked pre-January, which meant they were therefore illegal and invalid. Another story in the French press suggested that Gueye had undergone a medical for Watford back in June of 2019 in Udine in Italy. Medical and hotel bills were allegedly picked up by local club Udinese, who happen to have the same owners as Watford: the Pozzo family. This would have been against FIFA regulations.

> "We have uncovered certain elements that could suggest discussions with Watford took place before January 1"
>
> **Pierre-Henri Bovis, lawyer**

For his part Gueye made no comment until June 14, when he finally released a statement to French sports paper *L'Équipe*, first confirming that he would leave Le Havre this summer. In addition, he stated that given the "irregularities" in the contract with Watford, and considering that the contract had not yet come into effect, "I hereby give notice that this is the end of any contractual link to Watford."

Of course, all these machinations alerted a number of other clubs to the possibility of being able to bag Gueye for themselves. Sources close to the player claimed his preferred option was to stay in France and play in Ligue 1 for "two or three years, before leaving to go abroad." The same sources also claimed that Marseille, Metz, Strasbourg, Angers and Nantes were interested in obtaining Gueye's signature. Finally, after passing a medical on Tuesday June 30, Gueye opted to sign a four-year contract with Marseille, where he'll wear the No.22 shirt. "I've dreamed of playing for this club since I was a little kid," said Gueye

Tug-of-war...Watford had originally posted this image on Twitter to announce the deal

Official...Gueye presented as a Marseille player alongside president Jacques-Henri Eyraud

after inking his contract. "I'm really happy to have made it here."

Describing his style as "my attempt to mix the technique of Paul Pogba and the ball-winning capabilities of N'Golo Kante," Gueye isn't short of confidence in his own abilities. The fact that Marseille will be competing in the 2020-21 Champions League will give him ample chance to show whether he can live up to his own hype.

Gueye's rumoured salary on the French south coast is between €30,000 and €45,000 per month, which is similar to what his "non-contract" at Watford was believed to be worth. Given that the player was out of contract with Le Havre, Marseille believe that no transfer fee will be paid. Under the circumstances though, it seems likely that Watford will make a move to claim damages from Marseille over a player they thought they'd signed, but who finally slipped through their fingers.

Howard Johnson

Johan Derksen

Dutch players condemn TV pundit's racist remark

Dutch football has long produced opinionated and narcissistic characters, but few have had as much push-back as a journeyman footballer turned TV analyst, who has united the entire Netherlands national team against him.

Johan Derksen, who wears a Beatles-style mop haircut and bushy moustache, has made a successful television career from being every bit as off colour as his closet of pastel and purple jackets.

While footballing opinions of the likes of the late Johan Cruyff, Louis van Gaal and Leo Beenhakker often have an air of pomposity about them, Derksen has made a career of damning analysis of both football and society that has caused much offence but also made him must-watch TV in the Netherlands.

The former defender for Go Ahead Eagles, Cambuur Leeuwarden, Veendam, Haarlem and MVV Maastricht became a journalist in retirement, and later the long-standing editor of the Dutch weekly *Voetbal International*.

In recent years Derksen has outraged with views over homosexuality, Moroccan and Turkish immigrants, and once compared a black Dutch politician to a monkey. He seemed to thrive on the headlines he caused but now is being dismissed as "mourning the past and missing out on the future" as one columnist put it.

Leader...Dutch captain Virgil van Dijk has led the boycott

The latest controversy, which led the players of the Dutch team to announce a boycott of his show, came in the context of a wider debate over a traditional Christmas festivity that has been as quintessentially Dutch as Halloween is American.

Every December 5, the Netherlands celebrates "*Sinterklaas*" where St. Nicholas parades through town on a horse and his assistant "*Zwarte Piet*" (Black Pete) hands out sweets.

It marks the start of the gift-giving season but the debate over the racist nature of the Black Pete character, dressed in 16th century jester-style costume and with face painted black, has gathered much momentum in recent years and polarised the Dutch.

It was in this context that Derksen delivered a barb at Dutch rapper Akwasi, who is of African origin and was a strident figure at June's Black Lives Matter demonstrations in Amsterdam.

The panel were discussing how ridiculous it was that a demonstrator had come dressed as *Zwarte Piet*, when Derksen said: "Are you sure that's not Akwasi?"

He seemed amused by his own attempt at humour but it fell largely flat in the studio and had a massively negative reaction after.

"This is just football canteen talk? This is just an opinion?" read a joint statement by national skipper Virgil van Dijk posted on his Twitter account to announce a boycott by Dutch internationals of the show. "No! This is way over the line. Not for the first time. Not for the second time. Time and time again. Enough is enough."

National coach Ronald Koeman said he supported the players, while advertisers came under immediate fire and began to withdraw support.

But Derksen refused to say sorry. "I do not regret this joke at all, although it was a wrong joke. It arose spontaneously at the table," he said a week later as the audience increased in anticipation of an apology that never came.

The last show of the season was cancelled as the panellists turned on each other amid the media storm. Whether it returns for the new season in mid-September will be as hotly debated as the action on the pitch.

Mark Gleeson

Pippo Inzaghi

Former striker will join his brother in next season's Serie A

A much watched recent social media clip of 2006 World Cup winner Pippo Inzaghi tells us much about the former Milan and Juventus striker, the man who has guided Serie B club Benevento to an utterly emphatic promotion.

The footage in question is taken at Benevento training on the eve of the club's promotion. It is like a step back in time. The 44-year-old coach opts to join in training to rehearse a particular set-piece move. In comes the cross and, guess what, the gaffer himself glides into his once favourite six-yard line position to head home a cheeky goal. Having scored, Inzaghi then runs round the pitch celebrating as if he had just scored one of his 50 Champions League goals.

Always a great competitor, Pippo the player used to drive some British critics to distraction. For some, he was a six-yard box merchant with an irritating ability to poach opportunist goals. "Born offside," as Sir Alex Ferguson once famously said. In reality, he was a wonderful goalscorer, whether he was playing for Milan or Leffe in Serie C. Former Liverpool defender Mark Lawrenson once commented to me about him: "I don't know what others think, but I wouldn't like to be marking Inzaghi."

Pippo Inzaghi is back, as competitive and hungry as ever

The point is that Pippo Inzaghi is back, as competitive and hungry as ever. For much of this season, more attention has been focused on his younger brother Simone, coach of the Lazio side that have produced such a fabulous season in Serie A.

In the end however, it was big brother Pippo who was smiling. Shortly after the post-COVID restart in Italy, his Benevento romped home to win the Serie B title with seven games still in hand. Things did not work out so well for Simone, but Lazio's splendid season still reflects his outstanding coaching ability. As of now, both Inzaghis are most definitely members of Italian football's fiercely competitive coaching elite.

Brothers...Simone (left) and Pippo (right) ahead of their last meeting in December 2018

For Pippo, success with Benevento represents professional vindication in the wake of alleged "failures" at both Milan and Bologna.

He concluded his stellar playing career at Milan in 2012 after 11 seasons at the San Siro. It seemed only natural that he would immediately assume youth-team coaching duties with his old club, and in February 2014 he achieved success by lifting the prestigious Torneo di Viareggio youth trophy.

That success prompted Milan to hand him the job as coach to the first team. However, the 2014-15 Serie A season ended with the unsettled club in 10th position, far from European competition, resulting in the dismissal of Inzaghi. Having taken a year out, he immediately re-established himself, winning promotion from Serie C to Serie B with Venezia in 2016-17.

One year later, he was back in Serie A, this time with Bologna. However, things did not work out for him, and after a run of poor results the club sacked him in January 2019.

The next turning point for Inzaghi came last summer when he received a phone call from the renewable energy tycoon, Oreste Vigorito, the ambitious owner of Benevento Calcio. The club, based near Naples in the Campania region, had won promotion to Serie A for the first time back in 2017 but had been immediately relegated. Vigorito wanted back into the top flight.

After Benevento had missed out in last summer's promotion play-offs, Vigorito sacked then coach Cristian Bucchi and went looking for a replacement. One of his close aides,

Parade...celebrating with the fans

Promoted... Benevento celebrate their title win on the pitch

Pasquale Foggia, suggested he give Filippo Inzaghi a shout. Pippo was on holiday in Spain, but immediately packed his overnight bag and headed back to Italy.

Next day over a restaurant lunch, Pippo pulled out the knives and forks, the salt and pepper canisters and outlined how he envisaged a new-look Benevento, players included. Vigorito was favourably impressed.

To some extent, the rest is history. With a squad that contained useful players such as ex-Wolfsburg midfielder Oliver Kragl, Finland international Perparim Hetemaj and the experienced Pasquale Schiattarella, Benevento dominated their championship.

So, what next? The Benevento idea is to do better than the last time and to avoid another immediate relegation. Two or three experienced Serie A players will be added to the squad, but not striker Loic Remy after he failed two medicals. Most importantly, Pippo Inzaghi will continue to coach the side on what is a return to Serie A for both coach and club. Much southern Italian pride will be at stake and motivation will clearly not be lacking, especially from the coach.

Paddy Agnew

Barcelona

Catalan club's transfer policy at odds

In the not-so-distant past, Barcelona were being lauded for their prestigious *La Masia* academy and the fruits of its successes. In 2010, they became the first club in history to have three academy players in the top three of the Ballon d'Or vote, yet a decade on the production line has stuttered, forcing the club to rely more heavily on new signings.

"They've got €250 million sitting on the bench", remarked commentator Gerry Armstrong during Barcelona's draw with Atletico Madrid in June, alluding most obviously to Antoine Griezmann. The ex-Atleti forward had to wait until stoppage time to come on, with Quique Setien suggesting after the game that his inclusion would "destabilise" the team.

As a No.10 or wide forward, the France World Cup winner would walk into any team on the planet. Any team, that is, without Lionel Messi in their ranks. The two players like to operate in the same areas of the pitch, which begs the question, why did Barca sign him?

Since Luis Suarez moved to Spain in July 2014 – arguably the club's last genuinely successful high-profile signing – the Catalans have spent close to €1 billion on more than 30 players.

Outgoing...Brazilian midfielder Arthur

Of that figure, three players account for over €300m: Griezmann, Philippe Coutinho, currently on loan at Bayern Munich, and Ousmane Dembele, who has started less than 40 league matches in three seasons in Spain. All three have failed to adequately replace Neymar in the front three, as have Paco Alcacer, Gerard Deulofeu and Malcom. Arda Turan, Andre Gomes, Lucas Digne, Jasper Cillessen, Denis Suarez, Paulinho and Yerry Mina have all come and gone, as has Arthur, following his €72m move to Juventus.

The Brazilian midfielder was dubbed "the next Xavi" when he arrived from Gremio in 2018 as a 21-year-old. He impressed during his first season, playing 44 times in all competitions, before suffering injuries and a worrying lack of consistency in 2019-20.

Nevertheless, many Barcelona fans were aggrieved to read reports of his move to Turin, which saw 30-year-old Miralem Pjanic move in the opposite direction for €60m.

Hector Font, a candidate for Barcelona's presidency, gave his opinion on the matter: "The deal once again shows that the board's absolute priority is to balance the books by letting key players go. The financial situation has been bad for many years, long before the pandemic."

> Since Luis Suarez moved to Spain in July 2014…the Catalans have spent close to €1 billion on more than 30 players

Indeed, although it would appear that Juve effectively paid Barcelona €12m for Arthur, the accounting treatment in how teams report incoming transfer fees versus outgoing fees means *La Blaugrana* can actually report around €60m profit.

What the deal essentially translates to is a lack of a sporting project, a worrying insight into the club's financial situation and further proof of a flawed transfer policy. Be it bad luck, bad judgement or bad accountancy, something must give at Barcelona.

Jared Tinslay

WORLD SOCCER 500

The 500 most important players

What goes into a list of 500 names?

First things first: this is not a definitive list of the top 500 players in the world. Such lists are subjective, and can exclude more interesting personalities in place of more polished professionals. Indeed, there are plenty of very good players that haven't made our list, and arguably one or two world-class ones too.

No, we wanted to know the 500 most important players in the world – the most interesting, the ones we all need to know about, regardless of where they play.

When trying to decide on such a list, being able to call upon a network of experts from across the globe is handy. We asked our writers: which players enjoyed impressive seasons in 2019-20 – both before and after coronavirus struck – and who will be stars of the next campaign? Who will be the subject of rumours, speculation and transfers, and which young players will dominate in the future? Who could be a game-changer for their country on the pitch, and who makes headlines off it?

A new addition to this year's top 500 is the inclusion of female players for the first time, with our correspondent Glenn Moore putting forward his selections for the most noteworthy characters in the women's game.

A glance at the stats tells you that while in some ways the game is changing, with several players from growing powers Qatar and China included, other things stay the same – the big leagues are still on top, and if anything are more dominant than ever.

Nevertheless, with representatives from almost 80 different countries and more than 50 leagues, football remains the global game.

Flamengo...the Copa Libertadores champions are South America's best-represented team

00 by club

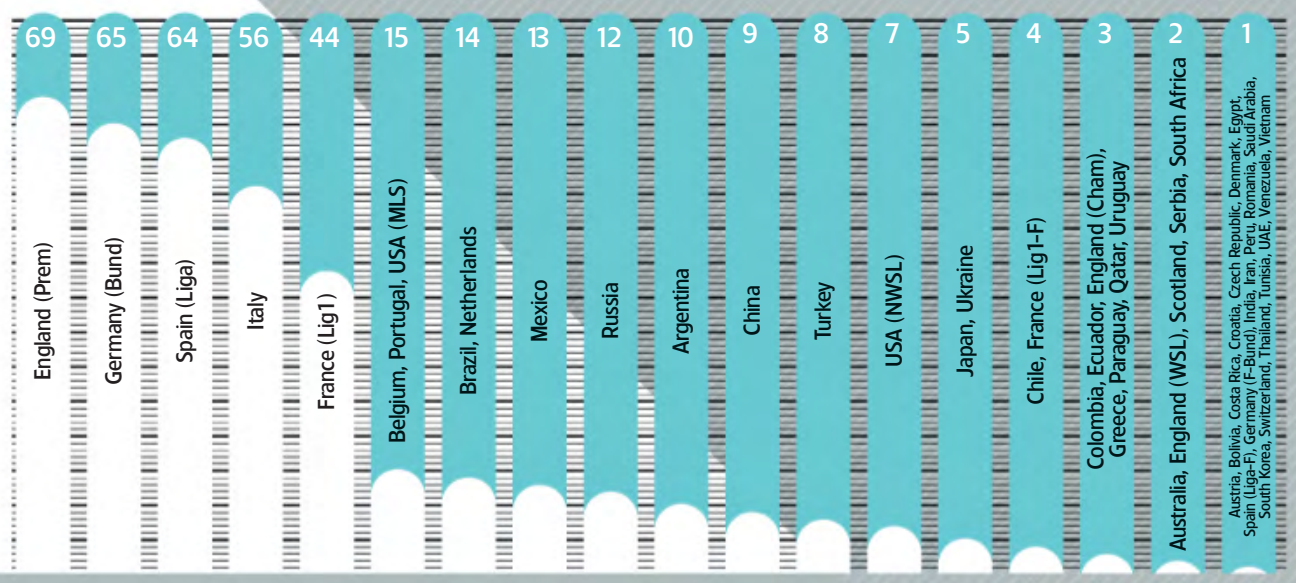
ar's list, with Liverpool and Manchester City sharing second

WS500 by nationality

1 Norway
4 Finland
12 Netherlands
2 Poland
32 Germany
3 Czech Rep
5 Russia
15 Belgium
32 England
3 Scotland
6 Denmark
2 Romania
11 Serbia
2 Ukraine
49 France
2 Tunisia
15 Portugal
2 Switzerland
3 N.Macedonia
2 Greece
5 Turkey
3 Iran
1 Armenia
9 China
1 Uzbekistan
3 Kosovo
5 Russia
1 Albania
4 Algeria
1 Thailand
1 Mali
5 Austria
2 Kosovo
2 Qatar
3 Slovenia
2 Bosnia-Herz
1 India
1 Vietnam
24 Italy
7 Croatia
4 Ivory Coast
5 Nigeria
1 Egypt
1 Saudi Arabia
2 Ghana
2 Gabon
1 DR Congo
2 Zimbabwe
1 Comoros
3 Cameroon
1 Angola
2 Australia

00 by league

ove to Chelsea helped the Premier League leapfrog the Bundesliga into top spot



Tied...Liverpool and Manchester City have 12 players each

Thiago ALMADA

Velez Sarsfield & Argentina

Who will take up the mantle for Argentina once Lionel Messi retires? Thiago Almada is widely touted as one of the prime candidates. The tricky, tenacious and talented winger has barely played 30 games in the Argentinian first division, but it has been enough to alert some of Europe's top clubs to his ability and potential.

Almada grew up on the outskirts of Buenos Aires in the underprivileged neighbourhood of Fuerte Apache, just like Carlos Tevez. At opposite ends of their playing days, both players now have murals gracing the sides of buildings in their honour. Like Tevez, Almada is widely expected to rise from his disadvantaged background to enjoy a successful career in Europe.

Almada plays in attack but prefers a deeper role than Tevez. Equally diminutive in size, in Velez's youth system he was deployed as a classic No.10. With a fully equipped box of tricks – from dribbling, skilfully avoiding tackles or delivering a deft pass – he is more of a provider than scorer of goals, though increasingly he does both.

Former Velez coach Gabriel Heinze handed Almada his first-team debut as a 17-year-old against Newell's Old Boys in August 2018. "How am I not going to play him if he's good enough?" said Heinze at the time. The debutant assisted the side's second goal. Heinze and Velez sought to dose Almada's minutes in the first team while nurturing his talent.

Not playing for one of the traditional "Big Five" clubs in Argentina dimmed the media spotlight on the youngster.

Yet Almada travelled to the 2018 World Cup in Russia as one of the youth-team players who would spar with the full national during training. In 2019 he impressed as one of the youngest players in the U20 squad in the South American championship in which Argentina were runners-up, yet he surprisingly missed out on the U20 World Cup squad later that year.

Velez confirmed Barcelona have made enquiries in recent months and they had already turned down a £10 million offer from Manchester City. After a stand-off over a new contract last year, Velez including a staggered increase in Almada's release clause that rises to €25m, in the unlikely event he stays until 2023. Velez have said: "If we receive an irresistible offer for a player, then we will assess it."

Joel Richards

Brenden AARONSON
Philadelphia Union & USA
Scored on his MLS debut for the Union in March 2019. His remarkable composure and maturity made him a regular starter throughout 2019.

Yunis ABDELHAMID
Reims & Morocco
Voted the third-best African in Ligue 1, the 32-year-old combined with side-kick Axel Disasi to create the tightest backline in the French top flight before the season ended.

Omar ABDULRAHMAN
Al Jazira & UAE
Still seen by some as Asia's best but, at 28, the playmaker, once chased by Manchester City, is increasingly regarded as a talented star that missed out on a move to Europe.

Victor ABREGO
Club Bolivar & Bolivia
The bustling striker was a surprise success in South America's U23 Championship, earning a move from Destroyers to Bolivar, where he began with a flurry of goals.

Francesco ACERBI
Lazio & Italy
The rugged central defender has missed very little of Lazio's brilliant season, and in the process has played his way into Roberto Mancini's Italy squad.

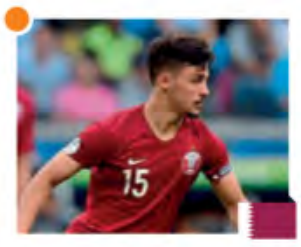
Sargis ADAMYAN
Hoffenheim & Armenia
Able to operate anywhere along the front line, he achieved the rarest of feats last October – scoring twice as his club pulled off a shock win at Bayern Munich.

Akram AFIF
Al Sadd & Qatar
The winger was a star of Qatar's 2019 Asian Cup success, scoring in the final, and has spent much of this season at the top of the goal and assist charts for Al Sadd too.

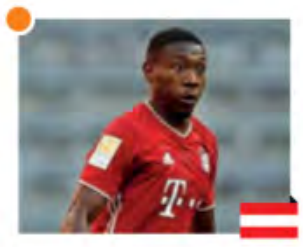
Sergio AGUERO
Man. City & Argentina
Manchester City's record goalscorer is still among the world's most clinical finishers. If he stays in England for another year, he will surely pass 200 Premier League goals.

Kluiverth AGUILAR
Alianza Lima & Peru
Strapping attacking right-back in the mould of Brazil's Maicon, who is set to join Manchester City in the middle of next year. Played for Peru's U23s at the age of 16.

Rayan AIT-NOURI
Angers & France
With his contract up in 2021, the highly-rated France U21 left-back looked sure to move this summer. A recent extension means that if he does go, Angers will be suitably rewarded.



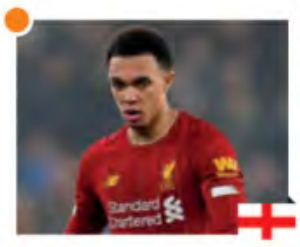
Bassam AL RAWI
Al Duhail & Qatar
The powerful centre-back was another key player in Qatar's 2019 Asian Cup triumph, and this season has been helping Al Duhail edge close to another title.



David ALABA
Bayern Munich & Austria
Wherever he plays, Alaba is outstanding. Once a left-back or midfielder, he spent most of last season in the centre of Bayern's defence and made it look ridiculously easy.

Luis ALBERTO
Lazio & Spain
Many observers' idea of the 2019-20 player of the year in Italy. A playmaker with great vision, a superb crosser of the ball, he is the metronome who keeps Lazio ticking.

Jordy ALCIVAR
LDU Quito & Ecuador
High hopes surround this central midfielder with strength of personality and an excellent range of passing. Already an international at U20 and U23 levels.



Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD
Liverpool & England
The sky is the limit for the young defender. Not since Dani Alves at Barcelona has a full-back commanded such influence over how his side plays.

Ali ALIPOUR
Persepolis & Iran
The striker's goals have helped Persepolis to win the last three Iranian league titles. The 25-year-old is linked with a move to Europe almost as much as he scores.

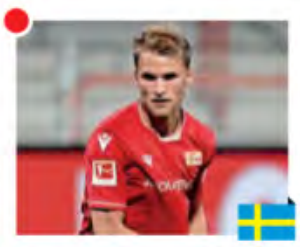
ALISSON Becker
Liverpool & Brazil
Since joining Liverpool, Alisson has won the Champions League, Copa America and now the Premier League too. Undoubtedly one of the planet's finest goalkeepers.

Dele ALLI
Tottenham & England
The 24-year-old recently became the youngest midfielder in Premier League history to score 50 goals – a reminder of his considerable talent and potential to grow.

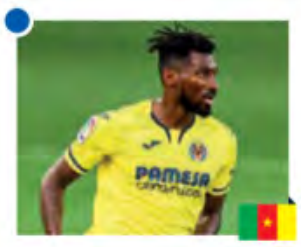
Yeray ALVAREZ
Athletic Bilbao & Spain
Two-time cancer survivor and Athletic academy product signed a seven-year deal in 2019, and formed a solid defensive partnership with Inigo Martinez.

Bruno ALVES
Parma & Portugal
At the age of 38, the much-travelled European champion with 96 caps is an icon in his native land. He may well sign up for a third season with Parma.

Dani ALVES
Sao Paulo & Brazil
Moved back to Brazil in 2019 after 16 glorious years. Plays midfield for his club but remains national-team captain and right-back, with his sights set on the 2022 World Cup.



Sebastian ANDERSSON
Union Berlin & Sweden
A steady stream of goals for Bundesliga new boys Union has boosted the profile of the tall target man. His contract has a release fee of just €5m.



Zambo ANGUISSA
Villarreal & Cameroon
After being relegated with Fulham in 2018-19, Anguissa bounced back by becoming a mainstay in Villarreal's midfield. Linked with a move to Real Madrid.

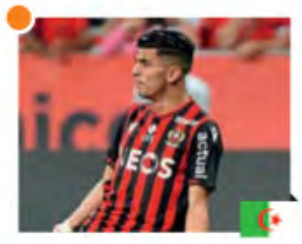
Charles ARANGUIZ
Bayer Leverkusen & Chile
Leverkusen coach Peter Bosz does not like to praise individuals, but for Aranguiz he makes an exception. The Chile midfielder is proof that keeping it simple is usually the best policy.

Matias AREZO
River Plate Montevideo & Uruguay
Striker with a touch of a slightly taller Sergio Aguero about him. Well built and balanced, quick off the mark, and dangerous with both feet or in the air, he became a regular first division marksman at the age of 16.

Maximilian ARNOLD
Wolfsburg & Germany
Don't write off the 26-year-old playmaker for being a one-cap wonder. He is the heart of Wolfsburg – cerebral, inventive and the owner of a left foot to die for.

Santiago ARZAMENDIA
Cerro Porteno & Paraguay
Stocky Argentina-born left-back whose pace and left foot impress in defence and attack. It is surprising that he is still in Paraguay.

Iago ASPAS
Celta Vigo & Spain
Vigo's vice-captain finished as the club's top goalscorer for the fifth season running. His goals were vital in ensuring that the club stayed above La Liga's relegation zone.



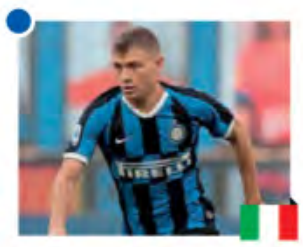
Youcef ATAL
Nice & Algeria
Out since December following knee surgery, the skilful full-back can also play as a winger. His versatility will be a huge boost for Patrick Vieira's side once fully fit again.

Chimy AVILA
Osasuna & Argentina
The striker had a stellar start to the season and was linked with Barcelona and Valencia before a cruciate ligament injury ruled him out of the rest of the campaign.

Sardar AZMOUN
Zenit Saint Petersburg & Iran
Talented Iranian striker, who has struck goals galore in an eight-year stint in the Russian Premier League with Rubin Kazan, Rostov and now Zenit. Regularly linked with the Premier League, and could be ready for the move soon.

Ezequiel BARCO
Atlanta United & Argentina
Now in his third year at Atlanta, the exciting young talent is yet to catch fire. Dour Dutch coach Frank de Boer may not be the man to get the best out of him.

Enis BARDHI
Levante & North Macedonia
A versatile midfielder who has shone from the left this season. Arsenal have shown an interest, as have teams in Serie A and the Bundesliga.



Nicolo BARELLA
Internazionale & Italy
One of the brightest talents of his Italian generation, the combative and versatile Barella is already an automatic first choice for both club and country.

Alessandro BASTONI
Internazionale & Italy
Has played his way into the Inter team in his first season. A product of Atalanta's academy with an educated left foot and strength in the air, a bright future awaits.

Christoph BAUMGARTNER
Hoffenheim & Austria
A young midfielder with the world at his feet. Adept at finding space, he also offers superb dribbling ability and composure in front of goal.

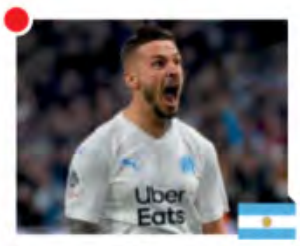
Hector BELLERIN
Arsenal & Spain
Injuries have stunted the rapid right-back's development in the last two years, but he has returned to regular action since the resumption of the Premier League.

Jude BELLINGHAM
Borussia Dortmund & England
A Birmingham regular after scoring on his Championship debut last August, Dortmund beat Manchester United in the race to sign the 17-year-old.

Andrea BELOTTI
Torino & Italy
Many claim that Belotti is the perfect central striker for the national team. Big, brave and skilful, Italy will expect much from him at the Euro 2020 finals next summer, while Torino are just hoping that they can hold onto him.

Wissam BEN YEDDER
Monaco & France
After a successful stint in Spain with Sevilla, Frenchman Ben Yedder returned to Ligue 1 last season with Monaco. Despite his side's disappointing ninth-place finish, he scored an impressive 18 goals in 26 league games.

Sven BENDER
Bayer Leverkusen & Germany
Not your usual blood and thunder defender, the 31-year-old prefers to rely on positioning, as he proved with his excellent form in the Champions League.



Dario BENEDETTO
Marseille & Argentina
Arriving from Boca Juniors in August 2019 for €14m, Benedetto hit the ground running. He couldn't keep up the pace, but 11 league goals was a solid return for his debut season.

Said BENRAHMA
Brentford & Algeria
Outrageously talented winger that formed the Championship's deadliest attack with Ollie Watkins and Bryan Mbeumo. Set to play at the highest level for years to come.

Yassine BENRAHOU
Nimes & Morocco
After helping Nimes to avoid relegation from Ligue 1 during a loan from Bordeaux, the club snapped up their option to buy the skilful midfielder for €1.5 million.

Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG
Arsenal & Gabon
The quickest player to score 50 Premier League goals in Arsenal's history, yet facing an uncertain future with a contrct that expires in 2021.

Wilmar BARRIOS
Zenit Saint Petersburg & Colombia
The holding midfielder is a coach's dream, a medley of tactical nous, back-line protection and the ability to regulate the play from deep.

El Fardou BEN NABOUHANE
Red Star Belgrade & Comoros
Known simply as Ben, the ex-Le Havre and Olympiakos forward combines expressive dribbling ability with goalscoring punch.

Karim BENZEMA
Real Madrid & France
2019-20 was his best campaign in Spain. Scored one of La Liga's goals of the season against Valencia, and provided an outrageous backheel assist at Espanyol.

Gabriel BARBOSA

Flamengo & Brazil

Charismatic, effective and victorious, Gabriel Barbosa is the biggest star in domestic Brazilian football since Neymar left to join Barcelona, with a similar capacity to seduce fans of teams other than his own. He enjoyed a glorious 2019, and was Flamengo's main attacking weapon on the team's swashbuckling route to domestic and continental titles.

But he also stands as an example of the problem of judging performances in contemporary South American football. At a global level, is he really "Gabi-goal," or might he be better classified a rabbit killer? After all, he made no impression at Internazionale or even on loan with Benfica – and came off decidedly second best against Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk in the final of the Club World Cup.

With pace, strength on the ball and a fine left foot, he is clearly a player of rare talent. But is he genuinely world class? Does he have the temperament for it, and might he be too one footed? The answers might take a while.

At the start of the year Gabriel agreed to turn his loan spell at Flamengo into a permanent deal – in part because of a lack of interest from top European clubs. He turns 24 in August – an age now considered old for a move across the Atlantic. He has already shown that he has the beating of South American club defenders. He may get the chance to do the same for the national team. There is a strong lobby in favour of his selection, and coach Tite can hardly leave him out of the squad for the coming World Cup qualifiers.

But his position is a quandary. Gabriel has suffered from the trend for 4-3-3 and 4-2-3-1. He is neither a genuine winger nor an out-and-out centre-forward. Portuguese coach Jorge Jesus was keen on a target man when he took over at Flamengo in the middle of last year. Without one he improvised a 4-4-2, with Bruno Henrique and Gabriel up front. Neither was a No.9, said the coach, and Gabriel was more like an attacking midfielder. Able to drop deep and roam, the system brought the best out of him – but the question is still hanging; exactly how good is his best?

Tim Vickery

Steven BERGHUIS

Feyenoord & Netherlands

A chip off the old block. A striking resemblance to his father has stuck with Steven Berghuis for a long time. Both gifted wingers with an adoration for beautiful football, but also never consistent and therefore never reaching their full potential.

However, that has changed since Steven Berghuis joined Feyenoord in 2016. The move gave junior the opportunity to show that more is possible and results speak for themselves.

Father Frank was a one-time international, who played for PSV, VVV Venlo, PEC Zwolle, SC Cambuur, Volendam and Galatasaray. For a long time, son Steven seemed destined for a similarly mediocre career.

After debuting at FC Twente in 2011, he was soon loaned to unfashionable VVV. Then at AZ, current Burnley player Johann Berg Gudmundsson usually got the nod.

His move to Watford in 2015 looked like an opportunity. However, his managers Quique Sanchez Flores and Walter Mazzarri never had faith in him and he only got 234 Premier League minutes under his belt.

A loan to Feyenoord one year later was his lifeline. And after winning the Eredivisie, the club's first title in 18 years, the deal was made permanent.

With the retirement of Dirk Kuyt, Berghuis' role has increased. After Jaap Stam was sacked and Dick Advocaat installed, under the captaincy of Berghuis Feyenoord remained unbeaten. The winger himself was the joint-top goalscorer in the Eredivisie before the league was cancelled due to COVID-19. A huge setback, because the Rotterdam club had narrowed the gap to leaders Ajax and AZ to six points while also reaching the cup final.

Without coronavirus, it might have made Berghuis' consistent season even better, but at least it was good enough to raise speculations about a transfer. The 16-cap international would like to move on, but not at any cost since he appreciates the co-operation with Advocaat and technical director Frank Arnesen. "I will only leave if the country, club, coach and league are right," says the 28-year-old who has learned from the past.

The question is now whether that environment exists or if there is no place like Rotterdam.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

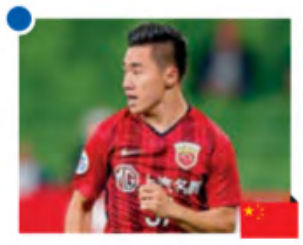
Domenico BERARDI
Sassuolo & Italy
Long regarded among Italy's most promising talents, yet with only five international caps, the 25-year-old could be at a turning point this year. Fiorentina are interested in him.

Yuri BERCHICHE
Athletic Bilbao & Spain
Left-back who played on loan at Cheltenham in his early career, before being released by Tottenham and almost quitting football. One of La Liga's most consistent defenders.

Federico BERNARDESCHI
Juventus & Italy
One of the most explosive talents in Italian football, he often gives the impression that there is much more to come, both for Italy and Juve.

Juan BERNAT
PSG & Spain
The left-back has overtaken Layvin Kurzawa as first choice in Paris. Has been a league winner for the past six years: four with Bayern Munich and twice with PSG.

Khama BILLIAT
Kaizer Chiefs & Zimbabwe
Skilful yet inconsistent forward who will be key to Zimbabwe's challenge for a place in both the next Africa Cup of Nations and the World Cup.



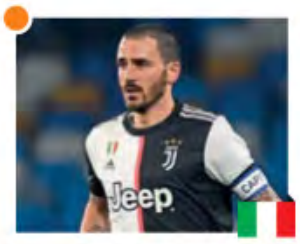
Chen BINBIN
Shanghai SIPG & China
With two China caps, the speedy 22-year-old has scored in Asian Champions League games and is understudy to Oscar in Shanghai SIPG's star-studded midfield.

Ludovic BLAS
Nantes & France
A Euro U19s winner with France in 2016, he has struggled to fulfil his potential since. However, after finishing the Ligue 1 season as Nantes' joint-top scorer, the 22-year-old attacking midfielder may have finally turned the corner.

Myron BOADU
AZ Alkmaar & Netherlands
Physically strong centre-forward who was rejected by hometown club Ajax and scored on his international debut against Estonia.

Jerome BOATENG
Bayern Munich & Germany
Just a year ago, the Germany international centre-back looked surplus to requirements at Bayern. However the Berlin-born star chose to stubbornly dig in, going on to make himself undroppable in another title-winning campaign.

Jeremie BOGA
Sassuolo & Ivory Coast
The former Chelsea youth player did so well in his second season at Sassuolo that various big clubs, notably Napoli, are interested in meeting his €30m valuation.



Leonardo BONUCCI
Juventus & Italy
Still one of the toughest and most accomplished central defenders in world football, Bonucci remains vital to the fortunes of both Juventus and Italy.

Miguel BORJA
Junior & Colombia
A high-profile move to Palmeiras didn't work out for the Colombia international, but he's averaged a goal every other game since moving back home with Junior.

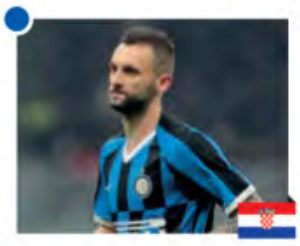
Denis BOUANGA
Saint-Etienne & Gabon
The Gabon international is a right-footed left winger who scored eight goals for a poor Nimes side in 2018-19. Since joining *Les Verts* last summer, he's been even more dangerous, scoring ten goals and creating three in Ligue 1.

Dedryck BOYATA
Hertha Berlin & Belgium
A free transfer from Celtic last year, the Belgian has become a mountain for Hertha. Uncompromising in his defensive work, a true leader and a goal threat at set-pieces.

Julian BRANDT
Borussia Dortmund & Germany
Has been used as an attacking midfielder, deep-lying regulator, striker or wide-man in his first season at Dortmund. A bright future lies ahead.

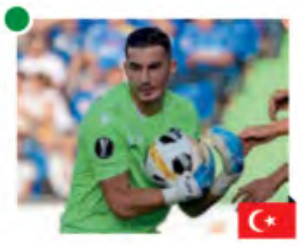
Lucy BRONZE
Lyon Feminin & England
The best player in the world (according to Phil Neville) will return to Man. City after the Champions League – three years after leaving to join Lyon, where she won three league titles.

Scott BROWN
Celtic & Scotland
The fierce competitor already has 21 domestic honours in his trophy cabinet, but could make history in 2021 by captaining Celtic to a tenth league title in a row.



Marcelo BROZOVIC
Internazionale & Croatia
A key figure in Antonio Conte's Inter and a star of Croatia's run to the 2018 World Cup Final, Brozovic is the complete midfielder – a playmaker vital both in defence and attack.

Jovane CABRAL
Sporting & Cape Verde
After an explosive start to his senior career in 2018-19, injuries stunted the winger's progress. But Jovane has re-emerged in style, allying effervescent wing play with magnificent free-kick goals, and will be a star for Sporting next season.

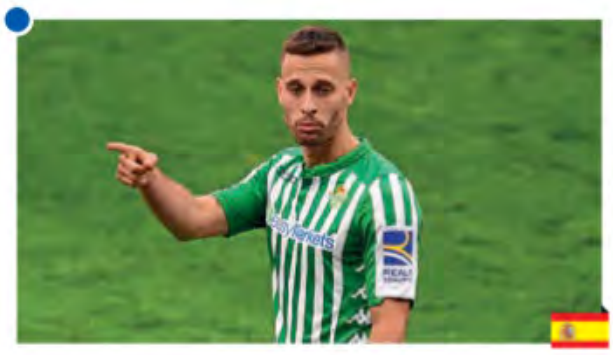


Ugurcan CAKIR
Trabzonspor & Turkey
The commanding and ever-improving 24-year-old has been linked with a move to several European clubs, including Chelsea, and is likely to be a future star.

Eduardo CAMAVINGA
Rennes & France
Aged just 17, the elegant defensive midfielder has caused a stir following some standout performances at Rennes, with Real Madrid interested.

Jaminton CAMPAZ
Deportes Tolima & Colombia
Honed his technique playing on the beach as a kid, Jaminton scored a top-corner screamer on his league debut at the age of 16. Now playing in a more central position, the diminutive forward has sparkled for Tolima this year.

Emre CAN
Borussia Dortmund & Germany
A great piece of transfer business in the January window, Can has added much-needed steel, initiative and desire to the Dortmund ranks.



Sergio CANALES
Real Betis & Spain
The former wonderkid joined Real Madrid as an 18-year-old in 2010, but is now enjoying his prime years at Betis. Provided plenty of goals and assists in 2019-20, and created more chances for his side than any other team-mate.

Victor CANTILLO
Corinthians & Colombia
Central midfielder who recently joined from Junior in his native Colombia, and made a quick impression with his capacity to knit the side together with his pass-and-move game.

Diego CARLOS
Sevilla & Brazil
Tough centre-back who's transformed Sevilla into one of Spain's sturdiest sides since arriving in 2019. Linked with Liverpool and Barcelona among others.

CASEMIRO
Real Madrid & Brazil
The Brazilian midfielder has serious claims to be the best defensive protector in the world. He does the dirty work that allows Real's attackers to flourish – nobody made more interceptions or tackles for the Spanish champions in 2019-20.

Gaetano CASTROVILLI
Fiorentina & Italy
In his first season in Serie A, Castrovilli not only established himself at Fiorentina but he also won his first cap for Italy, in a Euro 2020 qualifier.

Steven CAULKER
Alanyaspor & England
Still just 28, the ex-Spurs centre-back has overcome addiction and depression to rebuild his career at Alanyaspor, with some assured performances for the overachievers.

Santi CAZORLA
Al Sadd & Spain
After overtaking Juan Riquelme as Villarreal's top-scoring midfielder in 2019-20, Cazorla will end his career by joining his former Spain team-mate Xavi in Qatar.

Thomas CHACON
Minnesota United & Uruguay
Minnesota joined the MLS trend of signing Latin midfielders by shelling out $4m for the Danubio man – a significant sum for an 18-year-old.

Nacer CHADLI
Monaco & Belgium
On loan from Monaco, the winger was too good for the Belgian league with eight goals and four assists in 17 games at Anderlecht. Too pricey for Anderlecht, his parent club no longer requires his services, so his future is uncertain.

Rayan CHERKI
Lyon & France
The most talked-about youngster in France looks like he'll get more game time with Lyon in 2020-21. Watch out for fireworks from a winger of prodigious talent.

Giorgio CHIELLINI
Juventus & Italy
Experienced and rugged defender who forms an intimidating defensive wall next to Bonucci both for Juve and Italy. Less polished than his partner but terribly effective.

Federico CHIESA
Fiorentina & Italy
Sought after young winger and set to be a key member of Italy's squad at the Euros, where he will likely match his father Enrico's record of 22 international caps.

Ben CHILWELL
Leicester & England
Having established himself as Gareth Southgate's first choice left-back, Manchester City and Chelsea are rumoured to be preparing bids for the 23-year-old.

Mounir CHOUIAR
Dijon & France
Enjoyed a break-through season after joining Dijon from Lens last year. An exciting dribbler, he scored four goals and created a host of chances from the left wing.

Samuel CHUKWUEZE
Villarreal & Nigeria
Incredibly quick and skilful winger inspired by Nigeria legend Jay-Jay Okocha. Linked with Arsenal, Manchester City, Chelsea and Liverpool.

Antoine COLASSIN
Anderlecht & Belgium
Industrious striker who debuted with a goal against arch-rivals Club Brugge. He is not as flamboyant as some of his peers at the club, but has a keen eye for goal.

Florinel COMAN
FCSB & Romania
Left winger blessed with electrifying pace, velvet dexterity on the ball and sniper finishing skills. Still just 22, he's been linked with many of Italy's leading sides.

Gianluigi BUFFON
Juventus & Italy

This will almost certainly be Gigi Buffon's last season as a professional footballer. About time, you might say. The winner of one World Cup (2006), nine Italian titles, and more international caps than any Italian man in history (176), Buffon broke another record recently by overtaking Paolo Maldini on 647 Serie A appearances.

There is now little left for him to achieve in domestic football. He will need to play until 2022 in order to break one of the few Serie A records he doesn't already possess by becoming the league's oldest player, but that is unlikely to be a signicant factor in deciding his future.

A Champions League medal is still absent from his collection, yet having eluded him so cruelly thus far – beaten in three finals and sent off in the dying seconds of the 2018 semis – he may accept that he will never lift that trophy.

These days, of course, Buffon is a part-time goalkeeper, called in for cup games and occasional league outings, reserve to Poland's Wojciech Szczesny.

Yet such is his iconic status in Italian and world football, Juventus were more than happy to renew his contract for one more year this summer.

To have a figure like Buffon still at the heart of the team, dispensing wisdom, good counsel and fierce motivation in the Old Lady dressing room is obviously priceless, and was missed during his year at Paris Saint-Germain in 2018-19. His presence at the heart of the Juve dressing room has been key in making the club such a relentless winning machine over the last decade. On top of that, *Gazzetta dello Sport* points out that Buffon is one of the few players in the squad who can talk man-to-man to Cristiano Ronaldo (and be listened to).

Given that his professional career started at the age of 17, next season will represent Buffon's 26th at the highest level. He made his club debut for Parma in a Serie A home game in November 1995 against the mighty Milan, then one of the strongest clubs in world football. Cool as anything, Buffon played a blinder, making key saves from players such as Roberto Baggio to keep a clean sheet in a 0-0 draw.

His international debut two years later was even more dramatic. He was brought on in a World Cup play-off away to Russia in Moscow in October 1997, replacing injured first-choice goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca. The game was played in a mini-blizzard on a potato patch of a pitch, but the young keeper showed no nerves as Italy held on for a 1-1 draw that set them up to qualify for France '98.

On the morning of that first game against Milan, his coach Nevio Scala had knocked on his door, just a little worried, asking Buffon: "I am thinking of playing you this afternoon...Is that any problem?" said Scala. "No problem," came the immediate reply. It was "no problem" then and it has been "no problem" ever since.

Paddy Agnew

Kingsley COMAN
Bayern Munich & France
The 24-year-old Parisian possesses flair and awareness, so it is a pity that he spends so much time in the treatment room. Bayern still have total faith in him though, rejecting Manchester City's offer to include him in the Leroy Sane deal.

Anderson CONTRERAS
Caracas & Venezuela
A left-footed midfielder of fluid movement and slick passing. Broke through in last year's league title win, and went into 2020 eager to take more responsibility. The 19-year-old will surely be on the move before too long.

Sebastian CORDOVA
America & Mexico
Talented attacking midfielder who, at 23, has earned a place at America, the most demanding team in Mexico. He is expected to move to Europe after the Olympics.

Andreas CORNELIUS
Parma & Denmark
On loan from Atalanta, the powerful target man produced his best season outside Denmark in 2019-20, having struggled at Cardiff and Bordeaux. Likely to move again.

Jesus CORONA
Porto & Mexico
The inventive Mexican has been Porto's player of the season, picking up man-of-the-match awards whether stationed at wing-back or in his original position as a winger.

Diego COSTA
Atletico Madrid & Spain
Produced his most prolific La Liga season since rejoining Atletico in 2017, in spite of Diego Simeone often favouring Alvaro Morata to spearhead the attack instead.

Philippe COUTINHO
Bayern Munich & Brazil
The Brazilian has unexpectedly struggled to consistently make an impression during his loan at Bayern, with far too few glimpses of the party pieces of which he is capable.

Domenico CRISCITO
Genoa & Italy
After seven seasons at Zenit Saint Petersburg, the experienced Criscito returned to captain Genoa in 2018 – the same year he won the last of his 26 international caps.

Thibaut COURTOIS

Real Madrid & Belgium

Thibaut Courtois has turned a corner at Real Madrid. He arrived at the club in the summer of 2018, on the back of being named the World Cup's best goalkeeper. However, his first season for *Los Blancos* was one to forget.

Statistically the worst in his career, he conceded 48 goals in 35 games in 2018-19 and kept just eight La Liga clean sheets. Off the pitch, fans were calling for Keylor Navas to be reinstated as No.1, and Courtois to be sold.

That didn't happen and, at the end of the season, Navas was swapped for PSG's Alphonse Areola, while Zinedine Zidane confirmed that Courtois would remain his first choice for 2019-20.

The new campaign began in the same ilk as the previous one – Courtois was under constant scrutiny by fans and media alike, climaxing in what was described a "nightmare afternoon" by *Marca* in the Champions League against Club Brugge in October.

After conceding his second goal, some home fans stood to whistle and jeer the Belgian. Courtois was substituted at the break, with Zidane later dismissing reports of an anxiety attack - instead citing stomach issues for the change.

Needless to say it was a tough week for the keeper, but one that further emphasises his evolution from Bernabeu boo-boy to arguably their best player in 2019-20.

"I've grown a lot as a person," he told *Real Madrid TV* after being named La Liga's Player Of The Month for January. "Last year was not easy, and if you can't cope with this pressure, you can't be at this level. The key is not to lose confidence in yourself."

Since that game against Club Brugge, there have been more positives for Courtois - not least, starring in the penalty shootout victory over Atletico Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup Final.

He also became the first Real keeper to keep clean sheets in both *Clasico* league fixtures since 1975, and even got a headed assist from a corner in the dramatic draw with Valencia.

Real ended their three-year wait for the league title with one of the tightest defensive records in Europe's top five leagues, and Courtois was integral.

While no keeper may ever follow Lev Yashin in lifting the Ballon d'Or, Courtois can take confidence from Luka Modric's journey – the midfielder was voted La Liga's worst signing in a poll by *Marca* in 2012, before winning the world's best player prize in 2018. If this season is anything to go by, Courtois seems to be heading in the same direction.

Jared Tinslay

Juan CUADRADO
Juventus & Colombia
The talented and versatile Cuadrado can play as a wide midfielder or attacking full-back on either flank. Often decisive in attack, he has become a solid defender.

Marc CUCURELLA
Getafe & Spain
Left-back signed permanently by Getafe after an impressive season on loan from Barcelona. The Catalans will receive 10 per cent of his next transfer.

Colin DAGBA
PSG & France
The France Under-21 right-back played just one third division game before PSG snapped him up in 2016. Thomas Meunier's departure could see him become a regular.

Mohamed DARAMY
Copenhagen & Denmark
Clubs in Germany, France and England are convinced the teenage forward with goals in his blood has the wow factor. Born in Denmark to parents from Sierra Leone.

Jonathan DAVID
Gent & Canada
Lightning quick and smart, he scored 23 goals for Gent last season, and already has 11 from just 12 international caps. He is on the radar of Europe's elite clubs.

Alphonso DAVIES
Bayern Munich & Canada
In no time at all, the 19-year-old has gone from promising winger to supercharged, supersonic left-back. Probably the world's most exciting full-back.

Ulises DAVILA
Wellington Phoenix & Mexico
Once signed a five-year deal with Chelsea, and the potential they saw has been realised in Wellington. Backs up his skill and trickery with goals and assists.

Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA
Flamengo & Uruguay
Playmaker capable of moments of magic, yet often criticised for not producing enough of them. Despite 25 caps he remains an enigma for Uruguay.

Kevin DE BRUYNE
Man. City & Belgium
While City fell short in their bid to retain the title, De Bruyne was nothing short of majestic. His most productive season yet, scoring double figures for the first time.

David DE GEA
Man. United & Spain
Replaced in Spain's goal by Chelsea's Kepa, and likely to come under pressure from Dean Henderson at Old Trafford, yet still one of the world's elite shot-stoppers.

Charles DE KETELAERE
Club Brugge & Belgium
Rising star, fan favourite and Belgian champion in his first senior season, with a fine left foot and a strong presence in the final third.

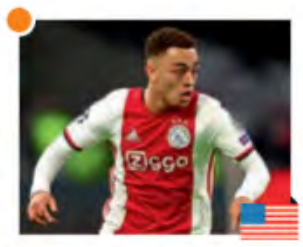
Pedro DE LA VEGA
Lanus & Argentina
The talented winger made his first division debut at the age of 17, and was one of the youngest members of Argentina's squad at the 2019 U20 World Cup.

DEBINHA
North Carolina Courage & Brazil
Closing in on 100 caps after proving herself a worthy replacement for captain and record goalscorer, Marta. NWSL champion in 2018 and 2019.

Troy DEENEY
Watford & England
Hugely influential captain at Vicarage Road who has played more games and scored more goals in the Premier League than any other Watford player.

Moussa DEMBELE
Lyon & France
There have been many admiring glances cast in the direction of the young striker, after 16 goals in 27 league games. The former Fulham and Celtic man won't come cheap.

Emmanuel DENNIS
Club Brugge & Nigeria
The unpredictable and quick forward made headlines by scoring twice at the Bernabeu last October. At 22, he is not yet the finished product, but a move is inevitable.



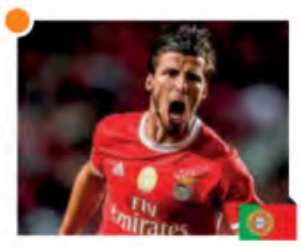
Sergino DEST
Ajax & USA
Right-back who loves to attack made a rapid rise through the Ajax youth ranks and, after just one season, looks set to be on his way to Bayern Munich, Barcelona or Juventus.

Angel DI MARIA
PSG & Argentina
Since arriving in Paris five years ago, Di Maria has been one of PSG's most reliable goal providers and played a big part in their enviable domestic success.

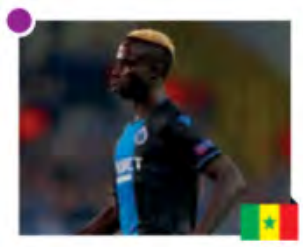
Moussa DIABY
Bayer Leverkusen & France
More proof of PSG's inexplicable disdain for the products of their youth system. The France Under-21 winger is a one-man dribbling show.

Habib DIALLO
Metz & Senegal
After a relatively slow start to his career, the 25-year-old is starting to come good at Metz, notching 12 goals in 26 league games last season. Other clubs are watching.

Ibrahima DIALLO
Brest & France
Defensive midfielder who catches the eye with his forward bursts. After failing to make the grade at Monaco, he's destined for bigger things like his brother, PSG defender Abdou.



Ruben DIAS
Benfica & Portugal
Consistently excellent centre-back with innate leadership qualities. An automatic starter for Portugal, Dias is likely to be the next big-money transfer from Benfica.



Krepin DIATTA
Club Brugge & Senegal
The speedy 21-year-old winger enjoyed a breakthrough season in Belgium, scoring six goals, after being named Best Young Player at the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations.

Jeremy DOKU
Anderlecht & Belgium
A product of the Anderlecht academy since the age of ten, Doku is a quick winger, deployable both on the left or right, who ties defenders in knots with his dribbling.

Kasper DOLBERG
Nice & Denmark
After helping Ajax to win a league and cup double, young Dane Dolberg arrived on the French south coast for a big fee at the start of 2019-20. He has repaid the club's faith in him by notching 11 league goals in 23 games.

Gianluigi DONNARUMMA
Milan & Italy
Paolo Maldini recently called him "the best keeper in the world". It's only a slight exaggeration - at 21, he is the future for both Milan and Italy.

Leo DUBOIS
Lyon & France
An obvious choice at right-back in *L'Equipe's* team of the season. The 25-year-old now has four France caps since his debut last year and could start at next summer's Euros.

Denzel DUMFRIES
PSV & Netherlands
Unstoppable freight train on the right flank who took the long route to the top via spells at Sparta and Heerenveen. Played twice for Aruba before switching to *Oranje*.

Crystal DUNN
North Carolina Courage & USA
Only missed one game at last year's World Cup, and has recently become increasingly influential as USA's most high-profile black player.

Edin DZEKO
Roma & Bosnia-Herzegovina
Dzeko's goals have been a bright note in a disappointing Roma season. As usual this summer, there is speculation that he will be on the move.

Georgi DZHIKIYA
Spartak Moscow & Russia
Combative and focused centre-back, who surely would have shone for Russia at the last World Cup if he hadn't been struck down by an ill-timed ACL injury. Came through the ranks of crosstown club Lokomotiv.

Jeremy EBOBISSE
Portland Timbers & USA
The USA international scored 11 MLS goals in 2019, then became a prominent voice in the Black Lives Matter movement with his essay, "It's not meant for your comfort."

Marcus EDWARDS
Vitoria Guimaraes & England
Admirable first season in Portugal, the zippy and gifted diminutive winger looks set on realising the potential he showed as a youth player at Tottenham.

Youssef EL ARABI
Olympiakos & Morocco
The prolific striker may be 33, but he has fired Olympiakos to their first title since 2017 with his goals, as well as dumping Arsenal out of the Europa League.

Harvey ELLIOTT
Liverpool & England
The slight 17-year-old has looked like a boy among men in his few outings for Liverpool, but his natural talent shines through. Set to grow into a first-team regular very soon.

Breel EMBOLO
Borussia M'Gladbach & Switzerland
After missing a large chunk of last season with a broken foot, the Swiss international bounced back with eight goals and five assists in the league.

EMERSON
Real Betis & Brazil
Attacking right-back on a two-year loan deal from Barcelona, although some reports suggest that Barca could pay to bring him back earlier than planned.

Christian ERIKSEN
Internazionale & Denmark
Perhaps the most talented arrival in Serie A during the January 2020 window, the ex-Spurs midfielder will be a key figure in Conte's new-look Inter.

Julie ERTZ
Chicago Red Stars & USA
Another veteran of the USA's last two World Cup wins, the 28-year-old is entering her peak years having won her 100th cap at the SheBelieves Cup in March. Started as a defender, but has developed into a midfield lynchpin.

EVERTON Soares
Gremio & Brazil
Waspish little left winger who likes cutting on to his stronger right foot. Was the hero of Brazil's 2019 Copa America triumph, so it is a surprise that he is still waiting for a high-profile move. That wait could end this year, however.

FABINHO
Liverpool & Brazil
Arguably the one truly world-class talent in the Premier League winners' midfield, the Brazilian is an excellent defensive shield, a slick passer and capable of scoring screamers.

Radamel FALCAO
Galatasaray & Colombia
When he is fit, *El Tigre* generally scores and Galatasaray prosper. Unfortunately, as he is injured all-too-often, he may be on his way out - but the talent is undoubtedly still there.

Wuilker FARINEZ
Lens & Venezeula
Tremendous reflexes made the Venezuela No.1 one of the most talked about young keepers in the world. His move to Lens was long overdue, but don't expect a long stay.

Ansu FATI
Barcelona & Spain
In 2019 the academy product became Barca's youngest La Liga scorer, followed by the youngest scorer in Champions League history too. Tipped for great things in Spain.

Paulo DYBALA
Juventus & Argentina
One of Juventus' brightest lights, Dybala combines the skills of playmaker and goalscorer, while also forming a good understanding with Cristiano Ronaldo.

ELKESON
Guangzhou Evergrande & China
Much hope is on the burly Brazilian's shoulders, as the first player without any Chinese ethnicity to represent the national side.

Cristian ESPINOZA
San Jose Earthquakes & Argentina
Registered ten assists on loan at the 'Quakes in 2019, before joining them permanently for a club-record fee ahead of the 2020 campaign.

Nabil FEKIR
Real Betis & France
A surprise signing for Betis having been denied a move to Liverpool by a failed medical in 2019. Put any doubts behind him by excelling in 29 league games.

Zhu CHENJIE
Shanghai Shenhua & China

Zhu Chenjie has made a remarkable start to his career by any standards. Halfway through the Chinese Super League 2018 season, the robust 6ft 1in central defender set a new record just three days before his 18th birthday by becoming the youngest-ever player to appear for Shanghai Shenhua, and the first born after 2000 to play for any Chinese side.

Barely a month later, he went one better by becoming his side's youngest-ever scorer with a magnificent bullet header in a 3-1 home league victory over Guangzhou R&F. By the end of season 2018 Zhu had already cemented his place in the first team of a club with a very poor record of giving young talent a chance.

The following season the Shanghai-born stopper continued his meteoric rise by being a virtual ever-present in his hometown team's back four, and, less than a year after his professional debut, gained his first appearance for the national team in a June 2019 friendly win against the Philippines. He finished an impressive 2019 season by being named in the CSL Team Of The Year, the Chinese Young Player Of The Year, clinching six Chinese caps, and his first silverware – a Chinese FA Cup winners' medal.

All told, it was not a bad first 18 months in professional football for Zhu.

A product of legendary Chinese coach Xu Genbao's Shanghai-based youth academy, Zhu's strength, aggression, focused demeanor, positional sense and sheer consistency appear way beyond his mere 20 years. In a league famed for its abundant quality foreign firepower, Zhu shone against powerful opponents despite his youth, and alongside the poor quality of his defensive partners at a club which heavily focuses investment in attacking players.

It's still early days for the Shenhua star, who now has to contend with the huge expectations of a nation desperate for success, yet still plagued by a largely dysfunctional and chaotic football system which places players under even more pressure.

However, with veteran national team defender Feng Xiaoting having joined Shenhua from Guangzhou Evergrande, the next stage in Zhu's development as understudy to the 76-times-capped centre-half is now mapped out.

Cameron Wilson

DODO

Shakhtar Donetsk & Brazil

For the best part of two decades, Shakhtar have proved a home from home for countless up-and-coming Brazilians, and right-back Dodo could well turn out to be one of the Miners' best-ever samba-land imports.

This season, his first as a Shakhtar starter, the diminutive 21-year-old has very much looked the part, full of pace, enterprise and accurate delivery on the overlap, aggressive in defensive mode and exhibiting rare match IQ for one of limited experience. Audacious full-back play is a vital part of every top team these days and Dodo is just the man for the job, quick enough to leave a vapour trail and equipped with a great engine. Inch-perfect low cut-backs from the dead-ball line are a speciality, while a typical Shakhtar move is for their full-backs (normally Dodo and fellow Brazilian Ismaily) to switch flanks.

Dodo, a native of Sao Paulo state, has been especially impressive this season in the Champions League, on the scoresheet in a 2-2 home draw versus Dinamo Zagreb and providing assists in a loss to Atalanta and 1-1 draw at Manchester City. Little wonder Bayern Munich are rumoured to be interested. Already capped at U20 and U23 level, the youngster has every chance of eventually succeeding the evergreen Dani Alves as Brazil's right-back.

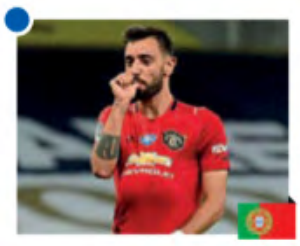
Shakhtar, who signed him from Brazilian side Coritiba in December 2017, have to be commended for the patience and care with which they have brought him along. They did not throw the kid straight in at the pro deep end, preferring to offer him an in-house induction course before loaning him last season to Portuguese club Guimares. His coach there, one Luis Castro, is now his Shakhtar boss.

"After giving him six months to settle in with us, we arranged a loan for him with precise conditions," explained Shakhtar director of sport Jose Boto to Portuguese newspaper *Tribuna Expresso*. "We wanted him to learn under a coach with a similar philosophy to ours. Now he's back with us and is in the first team. He is worth 20 times what we paid for him."

Nick Bidwell

FELIPE
Atletico Madrid & Brazil
Successfully filled the gap left by Diego Godin's departure in 2019, and formed a formidable pairing with fellow South American centre-back Jose Maria Gimenez.

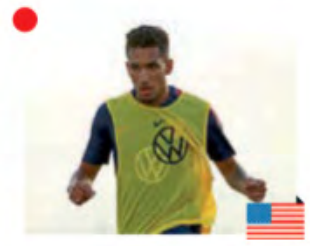
Joao FELIX
Atletico Madrid & Portugal
Atletico paid Benfica €126m for the 2019 Golden Boy, but he has so far struggled to replace Antoine Griezmann or find his best position.



Bruno FERNANDES
Man. United & Portugal
Such has been the turnaround in United's form since Fernandes' arrival, his impact will be compared to Eric Cantona if he can help the Red Devils return to the top of Europe.

Mario FERNANDES
CSKA Moscow & Russia
Both a classy perimeter marauder and a battle-scarred defensive operative, the Brazil-born right-back has served CSKA brilliantly since arriving in 2012.

Leonardo FERNANDEZ
Tigres & Uruguay
The young Uruguayan shone on loan at Toluca, scoring eight goals in ten games before the Clausura was interrupted. Since recalled by Tigres.

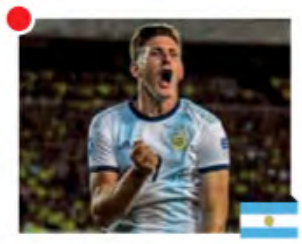


Jesus FERREIRA
FC Dallas & USA
A home-grown player from Dallas' academy, where his coach defined him with one word: "Special". Speedy striker, scored eight goals in 34 MLS games in 2019.

Roberto FIRMINO
Liverpool & Brazil
Anfield regulars will tell you that while Sadio Mane and Mo Salah are more prolific, Firmino really makes Liverpool tick. As a striker he is almost unique, a converted midfielder that torments defenders with his movement and link-up play.

Phil FODEN
Man. City & England
By the time he turns 21 next May, the ludicrously talented Foden is likely to be a regular for his boyhood club and on the cusp of a place in England's Euro 2020 squad.

Rogelio FUNES MORI
Monterrey & Argentina
One of the best foreign strikers to have arrived in Mexico in recent years and idol of Monterrey. He only has one international cap to date, but recently stated that he felt capable of playing for Argentina alongside Lionel Messi.



Adolfo GAICH
San Lorenzo & Argentina
Strong, athletic and with a smart finish, Gaich is more than just a target man. The 21-year-old has already played for Argentina and been linked with clubs across Europe.

Jesus GALLARDO
Monterrey & Mexico
Doubted in his early years after being converted from a winger to a left-back, his performances in Russia 2018 silenced his critics. Linked to Atletico Madrid.

Eric GARCIA
Man. City & Spain
While City are likely to pursue a new centre-back at the next available opportunity, the classy *La Masia* graduate would love to show that they don't need to.

GERSON
Flamengo & Brazil
Dynamic central midfielder with a classy left foot who slotted in quickly last year after being bought from Roma. With his confidence soaring, he is once again a target for clubs in Europe, where he last appeared on loan at Fiorentina.

GERVINHO
Parma & Ivory Coast
Arsenal fans might be surprised to learn that Gervinho continues to score goals in Serie A. Will probably move on from Parma this summer but could still remain in Serie A.

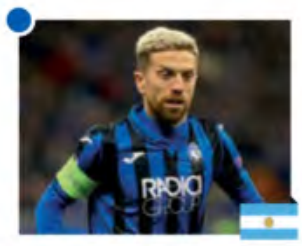
Andre-Pierre GIGNAC
Tigres & France
The best foreigner to arrive in Mexico in the last decade, the 34-year-old hasn't shown signs of decay. A cult hero at Tigres, after four league titles.

Billy GILMOUR
Chelsea & Scotland
Made his first Premier League start in March but looked like he'd been there all his life. The 19-year-old is a talent that Frank Lampard can build his Chelsea team around.

Matthias GINTER
Borussia M'Gladbach & Germany
Dortmund's decision to move him on three years ago hasn't aged well. Ginter is the ideal modern centre-back: tough, intelligent and refined on the ball.

Serge GNABRY
Bayern Munich & Germany
Now firmly established among Europe's best young wingers, he has come a long way since playing 12 minutes on loan at West Bromwich Albion in 2015-16.

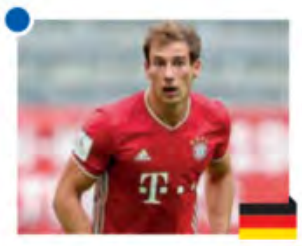
Igor GOMES
Sao Paulo & Brazil
Highly-rated product of his club's academy who has represented Brazil at U20 and U23 levels. The playmaker, whose height has seen him compared with Kaka, will be looking to establish himself as an important member of his club side.



Alejandro GOMEZ
Atalanta & Argentina
Arguably no single player has contributed more to the Atalanta success story of the last five years than the captain, playmaker, assist-man and goalscorer, "Papu".

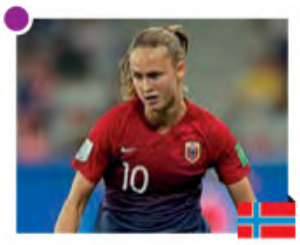
Joe GOMEZ
Liverpool & England
Having made his Premier League debut in 2015, his rise would have been much quicker without so many injuries. When fit, England's most talented centre-back.

Bafetimbi GOMIS
Al Hilal & France
The former France international was top scorer in the 2019 AFC Champions League as Al Hilal won it. Having finished runners-up in 2018-19, his goals this season have put the Riyadh giants within reach of reclaiming the Saudi league title.



Leon GORETZKA
Bayern Munich & Germany
Injuries ensured a shaky start to his life at Bayern, but the former Schalke star has been in top gear in 2020. Muscular, active and full of goals.

Amine GOUIRI
Nice & France
The young centre-forward made just one league appearance for Lyon in 2019-20. Despite wanting to keep him, the club respected the player's wishes to leave and sold him to Nice for a fee of €7 million, where he could be a real hit.



Caroline GRAHAM HANSEN
Barcelona Femeni & Norway
In the absence of Ada Hegerberg, she has become Norway's new superstar. Nine assists in Barca's league-winning campaign.

Jack GREALISH
Aston Villa & England
Heavily linked with Manchester United for over a year, Villa's creative spark was fouled more often than anyone else in the Premier League in 2019-20.

Mason GREENWOOD
Man. United & England
Exceptionally two-footed and described by manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as a "specialist goalscorer" after scoring four goals in ten days post-lockdown. On Gareth Southgate's radar and likely to be involved at the Euros next summer.

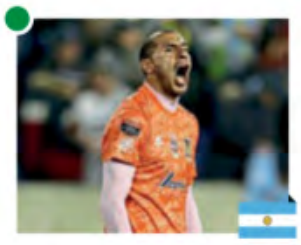
Antoine GRIEZMANN
Barcelona & France
Bought to take the creative burden off Messi, but flattered to deceive in his first season. Unhappy and linked with a transfer away from Spain.

Goncalo GUEDES
Valencia & Portugal
Portugal's 2019 Nations League hero is finally reaching his potential at Valencia. A scorer of outstanding goals, particularly against Osasuna and Granada in June.

Raphael GUERREIRO
Borussia Dortmund & Portugal
Learnt his trade at French academy, Clairefontaine. Has dynamism, good use of the ball and goal threat anywhere on the left.

Paolo GUERRERO
Internacional & Peru
Overturned a harsh drugs ban to shine at Russia 2018. His career is far from over – now with his third Brazilian club, he remains a top-class centre-forward.

Peter GULACSI
RB Leipzig & Hungary
Less is more when it comes to RB's unspectacular, low-key keeper. A specialist in saving the day with his coolness under pressure and smart decision-making, he has rebuilt his career impressively since being released by Liverpool in 2013.



Nahuel GUZMAN
Tigres & Argentina
Argentina international, who mixes excellent performances with unsportsmanlike attitudes, making him very unpopular. Scored in the CONCACAF Champions League.

Erling HAALAND
Borussia Dortmund & Norway
Wunderkind Norway striker, tall, powerful, opportunistic and insatiable in his hunger for action in the box. 16 goals in his first 18 games at Dortmund.

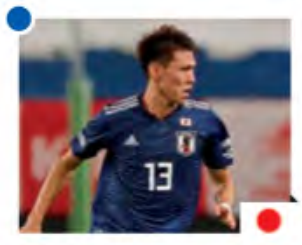
Ianis HAGI
Rangers & Romania
Son of Gheorghe, he joined Rangers permanently following an encouraging loan spell. Scored twice in the dramatic 3-2 win over Braga in the Europa League.

Achraf HAKIMI
Internazionale & Morocco
Inter paid Real Madrid €40m for the wing-back after a year on loan at Dortmund. On the counter-attack, the Moroccan is a runaway express train.

Marcel HALSTENBERG
RB Leipzig & Germany
Left-back has been a headache for Germany coach Joachim Low since Philipp Lahm retired in 2014. Luckily the 28-year-old has helped fill the void.

Samir HANDANOVIC
Internazionale & Slovenia
Long considered one of the best keepers in Serie A, Handanovic is fundamental to the new Inter currently being constructed by coach Antonio Conte.

Pernille HARDER
Wolfsburg Women & Denmark
Ran away with the Bundesliga Golden Boot to lift her fourth league title in a row in Germany. Closing in on Denmark's all-time goal record as well.



Kento HASHIMOTO
Rostov & Japan
2019 was a huge year for the holding midfielder. He secured a place in the national team and made the J. League Best XI, before leaving FC Tokyo for Rostov.

Artem DZYUBA
Zenit Saint Petersburg & Russia

Man-mountain Zenit striker Dzyuba was not always a Russian football brand leader, domestic goalscoring chart overlord, national team skipper and popular transfer target for a host of clubs in the West.

Indeed, for much of the 31-year-old's career, he has had to deal with media brickbats, condemned as too slow, too cumbersome, too inconsistent, too happy-go-lucky and too ready to clash with authority figures.

Back in 2017, he plumbed rock bottom. In the spring of that year, he was reportedly involved in a heated bust-up with Russia coach Stanislav Cherchesov. Just a few months later, he fell out of favour with then Zenit boss Roberto Mancini, who promptly banished him to the reserves.

Dzyuba, with 20-odd caps for Russia at this point, appeared to have no chance of featuring at the 2018 World Cup on home soil. Yet make the cut he did, benefitting from a successful loan spell at top-flight Tula Arsenal where he scored six times in ten appearances and the cruciate ligament injury which sidelined star forward Aleksandr Kokorin.

He was only a substitute when Russia began their campaign against Saudi Arabia, but soon would have his opportunity, replacing the misfiring Fedor Smolov mid-way through the second-half. Within a minute of coming on, he had headed home and subsequently set up another for Denis Cheryshev.

He would go on to enjoy a fine tournament, scoring three goals in all, creating two more and leading the line with power and poise. No other Russian played a bigger part in the side's unexpected march to the quarter-finals. No other Russian better embodied the team's new-found conviction and purpose. Gone was the brooding, argumentative soloist. In its place, a workaholic team man, a totemic caller of the motivational shots. The World Cup was the making of him.

"Artem inspires the team in the dressing room," gushed former Russia boss Guus Hiddink in an interview in the *Sport Express* daily. "He gives the side courage. Although he's not the most technical player on the team, it's impossible to ignore his presence on the field of play."

Since the heroics of 2018, he has continued to lead the line for the national team, starting every game of Russia's Euro 2020 qualifying campaign and scoring nine goals, as they finished second behind Belgium in Group I.

He's returned to top dog status at Zenit too, scoring almost 30 goals in back-to-back title wins, while also collecting a league-high ten assists in the 2018-19 season.

With the Russian champions keen to retain his services, there is time for more heroics.

Nick Bidwell

Daiki HASHIOKA
Urawa Red Diamonds & Japan
Reds' home-grown full-back broke into the national team last season and also shone for his club in the Asian Champions League. Fast, well-built and strong in the air, the 21-year-old impresses in both attack and defence.

Kai HAVERTZ
Bayer Leverkusen & Germany
German football's golden boy. Supremely-gifted and versatile midfielder with more than a hint of Michael Ballack in his make-up, though he also plays up front on occasion. It's an open secret that he will be moving for big money this summer.

Eden HAZARD
Real Madrid & Belgium
Initially struggled with injuries following his move from Chelsea last summer, but showed exciting signs of an understanding with Benzema towards the end of 2019-20.

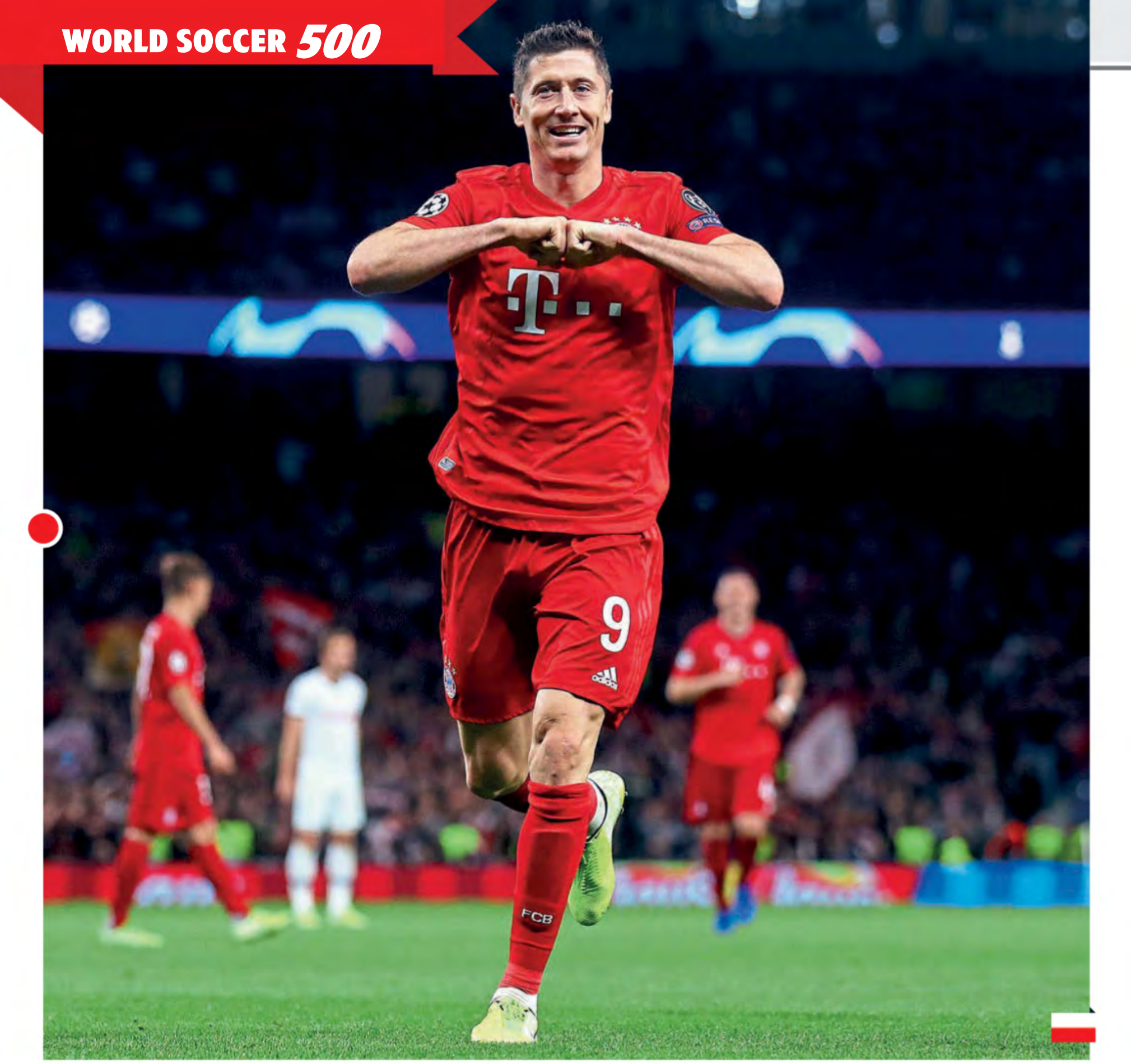
Thorgan HAZARD
Borussia Dortmund & Belgium
The ex-Gladbach winger once again used the Bundesliga as his personal playground, but found it harder to shine in the Champions League.

Hwang HEE-CHAN
RB Leipzig & South Korea
Both Liverpool and Wolves were hoping to sign the free-scoring forward for 2020-21, only for Salzburg's sister club, RB Leipzig, to pull rank.

Dean HENDERSON
Man. United & England
Two brilliant seasons on loan at Sheffield United have been the making of the young goalkeeper. Could well be No.1 for both Manchester United and England in 2021.

Jordan HENDERSON
Liverpool & England
Overcame doubts about his ability to become a trophy-winning captain at Anfield. Leader of the #PlayersTogether movement which donated to the NHS.

Rouwen HENNINGS
Fortuna Dusseldorf & Germany
Classic late-developer. At the age of 32, he became a sudden top-flight finisher for now relegated Fortuna. An ever-willing runner who holds the ball up well.



Robert LEWANDOWSKI

Bayern Munich & Poland

If every Lewandowski goal this season was worthy of a repeat fee, the Polish marksman extraordinaire would be busy counting a princely sum right now.

All strikers are defined by their ability to convert chances, and in this respect the Bayern Munich spearhead was peerless in 2019-20, dominating the Bundesliga scoring charts with 34 goals. This is the fifth time he has won the German Golden Boot award. To date, he has scored 236 Bundesliga goals in ten seasons at Bayern and Dortmund, thus making him the third-most prolific finisher in the history of the division, and the highest-scoring foreigner ever.

It cannot be stressed enough how instrumental the 31-year-old was to Bayern's eighth straight Bundesliga crown. He was responsible for over a third of his team's 100-goal tally in the Bundesliga, was a model of consistency – netting in every one of Bayern's first 11 fixtures this term and only failing to score in six matches – while doing an admirable job leading the line.

He certainly is not the type of centre-forward who waits in the box for others to load the gun for him. He brings double helpings of mobility, work rate and altruism to the table, combines superior athleticism and bodily strength, and is highly proficient in link-up mode, intelligent, precise and very much in his element when holding the ball up. Since arriving in Munich in 2014, he has improved year on year as both a team man and emotional inspiration. Bayern would not be the same without him.

"He is one of the most complete strikers in the world, if not the best of them all," declared Bayern coach Hansi Flick last autumn. "He's a leader, someone who inspires the whole team."

At the heart of Lewandowski's recipe for success is his implacable desire for perfection. He is obsessive in his approach to conditioning, fitness and diet. Advised by his wife Anna, a former karate black belt turned personal trainer, all manner of rules have been established. No milk or wheat-flour products; no fried food; a back-to-front meal sequence to aid digestion (a dessert to start with followed by rice and fish); the engagement of a sleep counsellor, whose diktats included a ban on blue light in the bedroom and a constant low temperature.

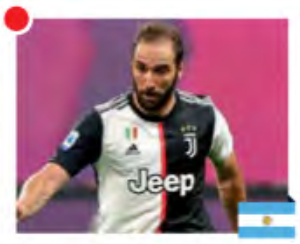
"I've worked very hard on my physical shape," Lewandowski told *Sport Bild* magazine last November. "I feel good in my body and mentally that's great. But that does not mean that I can relax. I want to improve, to try things which I haven't attempted up to now. My passport says I'm 31, though I don't feel it. I think my prime is just beginning and will last for a few more years yet. The best is yet to come."

Nick Bidwell

Bruno HENRIQUE
Flamengo & Brazil
Outstanding yet most surprising success of Flamengo's 2019. A late developer who combines the pace of a winger with the penalty-area presence of a centre-forward.

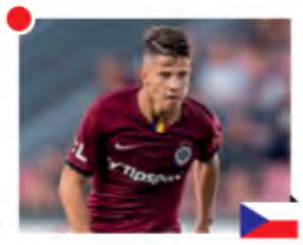
Matheus HENRIQUE
Gremio & Brazil
Busy central midfielder in a similar mould to the man he replaced, Juventus new boy Arthur. Passes quickly, breaks forward strongly and has already made his Brazil debut.

Patrick HERRMANN
Borussia M'Gladbach & Germany
One of Germany's unluckiest players. The bright and breezy winger would surely have won more than two full caps if not plagued by injuries.



Gonzalo HIGUAIN
Juventus & Argentina
The leading Serie A goalscorer of modern times with 36 goals for Napoli in the 2015-2016 season, Higuain remains one of the most complete strikers in the world.

Martin HINTEREGGER
Eintracht Frankfurt & Austria
The centre-back does three things very well: scores from set-pieces, puts his body on the line resolutely and talks straight in interviews.



Adam HLOZEK
Sparta Prague & Czech Republic
With ball-on-a-string dribbling ability and a fearsome shot, Sparta's youngest-ever player is the most exciting talent seen in Czech Republic for at least 20 years.

Lucas HOLER
Freiburg & Germany
The 26-year-old can play anywhere in the attacking third, is hard-working and resourceful, and does his share on the goalscoring and creative fronts.

Ricardo HORTA
Braga & Portugal
Creative and sleight attacking midfielder or winger, Horta has had another highly productive season in front of goal. Yet to add to his single Portugal cap in 2014.

Lukas HRADECKY
Bayer Leverkusen & Finland
Outstanding on his line, a genuine barrier in one-on-ones, and useful with the ball at his feet. A hero of Finland's Euro 2020 qualification.

Mats HUMMELS
Borussia Dortmund & Germany
Joachim Low no longer has room for the elegant 31-year-old, yet some argue that Germany could still use his experience and distribution skills.

Odion IGHALO
Man. United & Nigeria
An unlikely loan signing from Shanghai Shenhua, he has been a useful addition to Solskjaer's attack. The boyhood United fan would love to stay beyond the end of his deal in January.

Mohamed IHATTAREN
PSV & Netherlands
After Ibrahim Afellay and Ismail Aissati, the next gem of Moroccan descent to emerge at PSV. Gifted midfielder with flair, set to play for the Netherlands soon.

Jonathan IKONE
Lille & France
Ikone left PSG for just €5m in July 2018 and hasn't looked back. Performances led to a France call-up and a goal on his debut against Albania in September 2019.

Josip ILICIC
Atalanta & Slovenia
Ilicic's contribution to the Atalanta cause this season has been even greater than skipper Papu Gomez at times. Scored four times against Valencia in the Champions League.

Ciro IMMOBILE
Lazio & Italy
A bustling, aggressive old-style centre-forward who has been on fire this season, averaging a goal per Serie A game. Will star in Italy's Euro 2020 squad.

Danny INGS
Southampton & England
Liverpool career was plagued by injuries, but now showing the class that convinced them to sign him. Aged 28, still time for another crack at the top, with England caps to follow.

Andres INIESTA
Vissel Kobe & Spain
Possesses immense class even at the age of the 36. Hoping to sign off by guiding Kobe to their first Japanese and Asian titles, following huge investment at the club.

Lorenzo INSIGNE
Napoli & Italy
Naples-born Insigne has all the footballing ability to become a Neapolitan icon. One of the great talents of his generation, he remains vital to both Napoli and Italy.

Alexander ISAK
Real Sociedad & Sweden
Young forward tipped for global stardom after a successful first season in Spain. Keen to prove Borussia Dortmund wrong for not having faith in him as a teenager.

Daniel JAMES
Man. United & Wales
A result of United's renewed policy of signing young British talent, his electric pace and direct dribbling have been the basis for an encouraging first season at Old Trafford.

Reece JAMES
Chelsea & England
Impressed on loan in the Championship at Wigan in 2018-19, both in midfield and defence, and already a key part of Chelsea's back line. Outstanding crosser of the ball.

Gabriel JESUS
Man. City & Brazil
Has been waiting in the wings to replace Sergio Aguero since 2017, yet still a bit-part player. Could look for a change of scene if he remains second choice in 2021.

Raul JIMENEZ
Wolves & Mexico
Arguably the best out-and-out No.9 in the Premier League - clinical in front of goal, excellent in the air and a real handful for defenders. Linked with Juventus.

JO
Corinthians & Brazil
Has had an up-and-down career, but the lanky left-footer has enjoyed good times with Corinthians, and there are high hopes as he returns from Japan for a third spell.

JOAQUIN
Real Betis & Spain
Veteran winger who signed a new contract to remain at Betis until 2021. Became the oldest player to score a La Liga hat-trick at the age of 38 years and 140 days, and only needs to play 16 games to break Betis' appearance record.

Ozan KABAK
Schalke & Turkey
Schalke boss David Wagner describes the 20-year-old as one of the best young defenders in Europe. Previously on the books of Stuttgart and Galatasaray.

Boubacar KAMARA
Marseille & France
A local boy made good who made a number of impressive performances at centre-back and in midfield last season. France U21 star who's tipped for big things.

Hassane KAMARA
Nice & France
Will start the new season at Nice after moving from Reims in the summer. The south-coast club fought off Premier League competition to secure his signature.

Harry KANE
Tottenham & England
A recurring ankle injury has left some wondering whether he will ever recapture his devastating best form, yet has still scored over 20 goals for the sixth season in a row.

Hlompho KEKANA
Mamelodi Sundowns & South Africa
At 35, he should be turning his attention to coaching but remains vital for the Sundowns and one of the most consistent performers in South Africa.

Sam KERR
Chelsea Women & Australia
One of the WSL's biggest-ever signings arrived in January after scoring goals in Australia and USA. The Matildas' top scorer at the 2019 World Cup with five goals, she was the face of the successful Australia-New Zealand bid to host in 2023.

Taha Yassine KHENISSI
Esperance & Tunisia
Helped his club to two Tunisian league titles and last year's African Champions League. 28-year-old will lead Tunisia's bid to qualify for the World Cup.

Lukas KLOSTERMANN
RB Leipzig & Germany
Bought from Ruhr outfit Bochum in 2014, the Germany right-back can keep pace with any forward, and also possesses an explosive shot.

Orkun KOKCU
Feyenoord & Turkey
A No.10 who combines creativity and hard work, he turned down Netherlands' advances and chose to play for his parents' country instead. Just signed a deal to 2025.

Aleksandar KOLAROV
Roma & Serbia
No one in Serie A knocks in a better left-footed cross. Talented and reliable defender with 90 caps for Serbia, the 34-year-old shows no signs of slowing down.

Filip KOSTIC
Eintracht Frankfurt & Serbia
While the left winger lacks composure in front of goal, he has few peers when it comes to creating chances. Word is he wants out of Frankfurt.

Jules KOUNDE
Sevilla & France
Young centre-back signed from Bordeaux last summer who's instantly settled into La Liga. Formed a strong bond with Diego Carlos and a target for Barcelona.

Alex KRAL
Spartak Moscow & Czech Republic
The 22-year-old is sparking a lot of attention from the Premier League. Dynamic, strong in the tackle and good at spreading the play.

Toni KROOS
Real Madrid & Germany
German pass master known for his finesse and precision. Played in all but three games of Real's title-winning campaign, and finished the season with a pass completion rate of 93% – better than any other player in La Liga.

Dejan KULUSEVSKI
Juventus & Sweden
Another case of Atalanta's shrewd recruitment, who bought him from IF Brommapojkarna for €100,000 in 2016, then sold him to Juventus for €35m this summer. A regular scorer and creator of goals on loan at Parma in 2019-20.

Marash KUMBULLA
Hellas Verona & Albania
A big and powerful defender, his first season in Serie A has reportedly attracted the attention of Inter, Juventus and Lazio. Born in Italy but opted to play for Albania.

Alexandre LACAZETTE
Arsenal & France
The emergence of Eddie Nketiah and Gabriel Martinelli means that Arsenal may consider cashing in on their former record signing.

Konrad LAIMER
RB Leipzig & Austria
One of the most improved players in the Bundesliga, making particular strides in his distribution and tactical acumen. The all-action warrior does need to reduce his foul count.

Aymeric LAPORTE
Man. City & France
How different might City's season have been if the Frenchman had stayed fit? Strong and classy, the left-footer has somehow avoided international selection since 2016.

N'Golo KANTE
Chelsea & France
Last season fell short of the form that made him a back-to-back Premier League winner and world champion. A move could give him new spark – Chelsea want £54m.

Aleksandr KOKORIN
Sochi & Russia
Once Russia's golden boy, the tremendously gifted forward has ground to make up after a serious knee injury and serving a jail term for assault. It's make-or-break time.

Takefuso KUBO
Real Madrid & Japan
The "Japanese Messi" has huge potential, and played regularly on loan at Mallorca in 2019-20. The teenage sensation is expected to spend next year at Real Sociedad.

Gautier LARSONNEUR
Brest & France
The 23-year-old stepped up to the top flight with ease. Missed just one game as Brest preserved their Ligue 1 status despite a poor defence in front of him.

Ada HEGERBERG

Lyon Feminin & Norway

Even without kicking a ball in anger, Ada Hegerberg made headlines. Last summer she dominated the build-up to the Women's World Cup because she was not playing for Norway. This summer, though sidelined since rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee in January, she made waves by signing a decade-long €1m-plus contract with sports-boot giant Nike.

The deal marked a new level for the 25-year-old Lyon striker, who already had endorsements with such blue-chip companies as Hublot and Mastercard. It was further proof of her contention that the women's game is worthy of greater respect from "the men in suits", the officials of the Norwegian federation who had claimed it was "not commercially interesting".

Attitudes like that are part of the reason Hegerberg is now in her third year of exile from the national team, but even without the platform of international football her profile continues to grow. Prior to injury she broke the goals record for the Women's Champions League with 53 in 51 matches. Given her age she could set a mark that will never be beaten.

Her total goal tally, in a decade playing for Kolbotn and Stabaek in Norway, Turbine Potsdam in Germany, and Lyon, is nearing 300 at over a goal-a-game. This lethality has helped compile a roll-call of individual and team honours, headed by the inaugural Ballon d'Or Feminin in 2018 and four Champions League titles – the latest claimed on the back of her 16-minute hat-trick against Barcelona in the 2019 Final.

Her importance, though, transcends goals and trophies. She is part of a group of players, including Alex Morgan, Megan Rapinoe and Sam Kerr, whose name recognition is driving their sport forward and forging a pathway for the next generation.

Hegerberg's estrangement from her national team has its roots in incidents such as the men's team being given a truckload of boots to wade through and select from while the women's were given a set each ahead of Euro 2017, which arrived late, and some of them the wrong size. Now she will have enough custom-made boots to last a lifetime.

Glenn Moore

Joshua KIMMICH

Bayern Munich & Germany

Is it any wonder that Pep Guardiola took such a shine to Kimmich when the pair were in alliance at Bayern a few years ago? Pep, once an outstanding controlling midfielder for Barcelona, undoubtedly saw a lot of his former self in young Kimmich: the same mastery of technical execution, 20/20 vision, strong personality, ambition and total lack of fear. Pep expected great things from his then pupil and so it has come to pass, with the versatile Kimmich emerging as a main man for both Bayern and Germany.

Prior to the start of 2019-20, Kimmich invariably was deployed by club and country as an enterprising and adventurous right-back. This term, however, he has excelled in a brand-new role in the centre of midfield. Part tenacious ball-winner, part box-to-box dynamo, part cerebral link man. The 25-year-old Kimmich is the anchor which the rest of the team is built around - a classy mixture of playmaker, aggression and infectious will-to-win. He played more league minutes for the champions than any other outfielder, and even found time for match-winning contributions, notably netting with an exquisite chip in the vital away win at arch-rivals Dortmund in June.

Usually the Bayern player who covers the most ground in the course of a game, Kimmich looks every inch a future skipper at both club and international level. Even in his rookie season in the Bayern first team in 2015-16, he was undaunted by responsibility and has since developed into the guardian of the team's values. He suffers no fools, sets incredibly high personal and collective standards and is always brutally honest in interviews, ever ready to publicly shine a light on in-house mistakes or deficiencies. This is a guy to set the tone.

With the coronavirus pandemic wreaking havoc across the globe, he recently took on the role of social activist, setting up a COVID-19 charity initiative with Bayern team-mate Leon Goretzka called #WEKICKCORONA, and raising over €3.5m. The 25-year-old said: "We must help each other. With deeds, with gestures, with responsible action and with rationality. We are one society."

Nick Bidwell

Rose LAVELLE

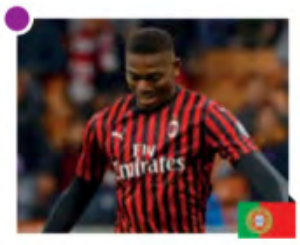
Washington Spirit & USA

Collected the Bronze Ball as the third-best player at last year's World Cup. Has an offer to join Manchester City in the WSL this summer.

Manuel LAZZARI

Lazio & Italy

Another key element in Lazio's success this season, his pace down the right flank makes him invaluable, be it as a full-back or a wide midfielder. Once capped for Italy.



Rafael LEAO

Milan & Portugal

Tall, fast and skilful, Leao could be a key player for the future of Milan. Of Angolan origin, he has nine Portugal U21 caps, but is still waiting for his first senior call-up.

LEE Kang-In

Valencia & South Korea

Korean prodigy with as many league red cards as goals in 2019-20. Tremendous talent who's been promised more regular football at Valencia next season.

Pierre LEES-MELOU

Nice & France

Since arriving from Dijon back in 2017, Lees-Melou has become a key cog in coach Patrick Vieira's midfield. Calm and assured on the ball with excellent vision.

Isaac LIHADJI

Lille & France

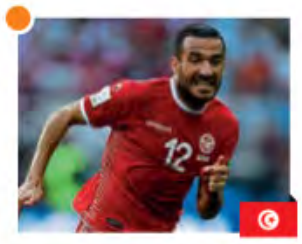
The highly-regarded youngster fell out with Marseille after turning down multiple contract offers. Joined Lille despite interest from Arsenal and Borussia Dortmund.

Marcos LLORENTE
Atletico Madrid & Spain
Silenced Anfield with a dramatic match-winning brace in the Champions League, the primarily defensive midfielder was subsequently used further upfield by Diego Simeone, starting five matches as a striker in the league.

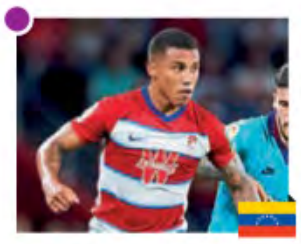
Hugo LLORIS
Tottenham & France
France's most-capped keeper and captain of both club and country despite some high-profile errors – one in the World Cup final, and another in his car when driving drunk.

Nicolas LODEIRO
Seattle Sounders & Uruguay
Lodeiro led Seattle to their first MLS title after arriving in 2016, and another three years later. A game-changer not just for the Sounders, but for the whole league, with many other clubs also recruiting their playmakers from Latin America.

Romelu LUKAKU
Internazionale & Belgium
Another fundamental pillar in the team that Antonio Conte is building at Inter, he has made a hugely impressive start in his first season in Serie A.



Ali MAALOUL
Al Ahly & Tunisia
The attacking left-back made his name with CS Sfaxien before joining Egyptian giants Al Ahly. At 30 he is too old to go to Europe, but one of the Arab world's most popular players.



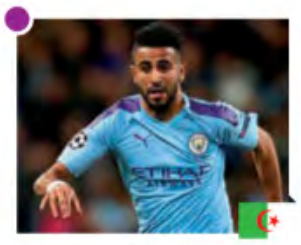
Darwin MACHIS
Granada & Venezuela
A revelation for newly-promoted Granada as they started the season among the title contenders, then clinched a Europa League place.

Jose Juan MACIAS
Guadalajara & Mexico
The most important talent of the new Mexican generation. Scored 13 Liga MX goals in 2019-20 – the first nine on loan at Leon – to attract the attention of several European clubs, including Dortmund, Real Sociedad and Bayer Leverkusen.

James MADDISON
Leicester & England
Unable to break into the England XI despite ten Premier League goals and 13 assists since 2018. Gareth Southgate wants him "high performance, low maintenance."

Joakim MAEHLE
Genk & Denmark
Genk turned down an €11.5m offer from Southampton for the attacking right-back. Failed to shine in the Champions League, but his credentials are not in doubt.

Harry MAGUIRE
Man. United & England
The world's most expensive defender of all time was handed the captain's armband less than six months after arriving at Old Trafford. A key man for Southgate's England.



Riyad MAHREZ
Man. City & Algeria
Hasn't always been a Guardiola favourite, yet registered double figures for both goals and assists in 2019-20. Will be even more important after Leroy Sane's departure.

MALCOM
Zenit Saint Petersburg & Brazil
Nothing wrong with his pace, left foot, dribbling skills or eye for goal, but after flopping at Barcelona and Zenit, he needs better career advice.

Donyell MALEN
PSV & Netherlands
Spent two year's in Arsenal's academy, but made rapid progress after joining PSV. Goal-minded forward who can play anywhere across the front, he made a dream Netherlands debut by scoring in a 4-2 European qualifying win over Germany.

Streli MAMBA
Paderborn & Germany
Fast and penetrative, the front man was a rare positive in Paderborn's disastrous season. Bought from third-tier Cottbus last year, he adapted well to the Bundesliga.

Steve MANDANDA
Marseille & France
The veteran keeper's career was re-ignited by Andre Villas-Boas in 2019-20. Mandanda was so consistent that he was voted into the Team Of The Season by readers of *L'Équipe*.

Sadio MANE
Liverpool & Senegal
The 2019 African Footballer Of The Year, having finished runner-up to team-mate Mo Salah twice in a row. A journey to the top filled with hardship, running away from home to pursue his career, but now rightly recognised among the world's best.

Faitout MAOUASSA
Rennes & France
Happiest at full-back but able to play anywhere on the left, he delighted Rennes by saying he wanted to stay for the club's first-ever Champions League challenge.

Moussa MAREGA
Porto & Mali
A vital cog in Porto's attacking game plan. Technically limited and volatile, but a force of nature and a brute of a player for defenders to deal with, it was his goal against Sporting in July that secured the 2019-20 title for Porto.

Dzsenifer MAROZSAN
Lyon Feminin & Germany
A summer move to the NWSL fell through, meaning she can add to her trophy collection with Lyon – starting with August's Champions League.

MARQUINHOS
PSG & Brazil
Arrived from Rome in 2013 and now a hugely experienced and decorated figure aged just 26. Will be even more influential after the departure of Thiago Silva.

MARTA
Orlando Pride & Brazil
Brazil's captain and record goalscorer, the 34-year-old's incredible career is beginning to wind down after becoming the first-ever player to score at five World Cups. Named FIFA's Player Of The Year a record six times, most recently in 2018.

Anthony MARTIAL
Man. United & France
The hugely talented forward is beginning to show the ruthless streak needed in order to become a world-class goalscorer. Aged 24, he still has time to develop.

Fidel MARTINEZ
Barcelona SC & Ecuador
Burdened with the title of the "Ecuadorian Neymar" and seen as a potential wonderkid for so long, but has now turned 30. Began this year's Libertadores with a flurry of goals.

Clinton MATA
Club Brugge & Angola
The tenacious and indefatigable defender has enjoyed an outstanding season. A smart operator in a three-man back line. At 27, the Angola star is keen on a move.

Philipp MAX
Augsburg & Germany
Attacking left-back who plays more in the vein of a winger, he piled up goals and assists in 2019-20. His father Martin was once a top marksman in the Bundsliga.

Dieumerci MBOKANI
Royal Antwerp & DR Congo
At 34, the evergreen striker with a nomadic career was the Belgian League's joint-top scorer – alongside Jonathan David – with 18 goals. Lethal inside the box and the focal point of Antwerp's attack, he was pivotal to their fourth-place finish.

Jhegson MENDEZ
Orlando City & Ecuador
Mendez signed for Orlando in 2019, and the hope is that the 14-cap international can bring back the excitement that was lost when the Brazilian Kaka retired in 2017.

Mikel MERINO
Real Sociedad & Spain
Failed to deliver on his rich potential during stints abroad at Borussia Dortmund and Newcastle, but the 24-year-old is hitting new heights as a regular for Sociedad.

Dries MERTENS
Napoli & Belgium
Four years ago, Maurizio Sarri resolved an emergency by using Mertens as a striker. After he broke Napoli's goal record in June, it is safe to say that the experiment paid off.

Lionel MESSI
Barcelona & Argentina
Another glittering season by Messi, he scored his 700th goal, was top of La Liga's goal and assist charts, and became the first player to register 20 of each in a season.

Vivianne MIEDEMA
Arsenal Women & Netherlands
A force of nature in the WSL, the Netherlands' record goalscorer has been directly involved in 56 goals in just 34 games over the last two seasons.

Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC
Lazio & Serbia
Ball winner, distributor, creator and goalscorer Milinkovic-Savic has long looked one of the most valuable players in Serie A. Back to his best this season.

Aleksandar MITROVIC
Fulham & Serbia
Reportedly the highest-paid player in England's second tier where he has been prolific. More than good enough for the highest level, and closing in on Serbia's all-time goal record.

Alvaro MONTERO
Deportes Tolima & Colombia
Consistently superb since guiding Tolima to an unlikely title in 2018. An authoritative presence, there are persistent whispers of a move to Europe.

Kylian MBAPPE
PSG & France

Don't blame us if you're bored by yet more talk of Kylian Mbappe. With the 2020-21 season on the horizon, the 21-year-old simply has to be the most valuable player in world football.

Indeed, research group the CIES Football Observatory currently values him between €200-€250m, and it is easy to see why.

With Neymar out injured for most of the curtailed 2019-20 season, it was down to Mbappe, above all others, to shoulder the burden of Paris Saint-Germain's attacking hopes. The fact that he delivered 18 Ligue 1 goals in just 21 appearances is testament not only to the youngster's dazzling ability, but also to a maturity and consistency of performance that belies his tender years.

Mbappe's profile has been so high for so long already, and the media scrutiny so intense, that there are no real surprises in his game any more. The question is, though, how do you stop him being so devastating?

The old adage runs that in professional sport the single most dangerous attribute a player can have is genuine pace. Mbappe has that in spades, but he also has a cool head in pressure situations, allowing him to almost always pick the right option in front of goal. The boy from the Parisian suburbs has been lucky to be aligned with Angel Di Maria, who headed the assists table with 14 in 26 games. But then again, Mbappe chipped in with seven assists of his own to show that he's an inspired creator as well as a clinical finisher.

With a staggering four Ligue 1 medals to his name already - including one at Monaco - not to mention the small matter of that World Cup final win against Croatia in 2018 where he inevitably scored, Mbappe already has a full trophy cabinet.

His motivation seems high, nonetheless, and PSG are still in with a shout of winning this season's Champions League in August. If they do get their hands on the trophy, will that make the task of convincing their brightest star to stay that much harder? What, after all, will he have left to achieve in his home country?

A COVID-affected transfer window may not be the ideal time for such a valuable player to move, but if he did depart, Mbappe would not be short of suitors. Real Madrid have been close in the past, where a union with Zinedine Zidane would appeal, as would an on-pitch partnership with Cristiano Ronaldo at Juventus, or even Lionel Messi at Barcelona.

Whether those clubs have the finances to compete with the Premier League, however, would be in doubt. The Manchester clubs and Chelsea would surely be interested, while it has often been suggested that Liverpool could trade in one of their famed front three in order to sign Mbappe.

Whatever decision he makes, it is sure to be the right one - just as it so often is when he bears down on goal.

Howard Johnson

Cesar MONTES
Monterrey & Mexico
Considered "the new Rafael Marquez" when he burst onto the scene at 18, Montes has established himself as one of the best defenders in Mexico. The 23-year-old has ten caps, and was recently linked with a move to Valencia.

Gonzalo MONTIEL
River Plate & Argentina
A stalwart on the right side of River Plate's defence in the past three seasons, including in the Copa Libertadores victory in 2018. Capped twice by Argentina, he is a "born competitor" according to his coach Marcelo Gallardo.

Junior MORAES
Shakhtar Donetsk & Ukraine
The Brazil-born centre-forward is a classic poacher, never straying too far from the penalty area. Ukraine League's top scorer twice in a row.

Gerard MORENO
Villarreal & Spain
Striker who more than doubled his goal tally from 2018-19 to become La Liga's top-scoring Spaniard in 2019-20. Made his senior international debut in 2019 too.

Giovanni MORENO
Shanghai Shenhua & Colombia
Just completed his eighth season in Shanghai, few players have had as big an impact on Chinese football as the talented No.10.

Jordan MORRIS
Seattle Sounders & USA
The son of Sounders' medical director, Morris is very much a home-grown player. Hit 13 goals last year, and returning to his best after missing all of 2018 due to injury.

Mason MOUNT
Chelsea & England
Under Frank Lampard's guidance, first on loan at Derby and now at Chelsea, the 21-year-old has developed into a promising and effective attacking midfielder.

Nordi MUKIELE
RB Leipzig & France
In Leipzig they just love young, adaptable players and the Parisian fits the bill splendidly. Able to put in a shift as a stopper, right-back, or at the base of midfield.

Marcus RASHFORD

Man. United & England

What connects Rashford with Sir Alex Ferguson, Sir Bobby Charlton and Vincent Kompany?

Other than being among the greatest figures in the history of Mancunian football, all have been handed honorary degrees by the University of Manchester. Yet while that illustrious trio were handed theirs at the end of long and fruitful careers in the city, Rashford received his this summer. He is 22 years old, the youngest-ever recipient of the award.

Of course, this wasn't really supposed to happen. If Rashford had been told this time last year, that in 12 months he would be being hailed as a hero across England, he would be forgiven for assuming that it had something to do with the European Championship. But then coronavirus happened, and the tournament was put on ice.

Instead, Rashford's summer has seen him become a hero off the pitch. To recap, he teamed up with charity *FareShare*, committed to supporting children unable to access free meals while schools are closed. He then turned campaigner, putting pressure on the government to continue to provide food vouchers for children who need it, and eventually forcing an embarassing U-turn.

For the young forward, it was a personal issue – he himself had grown up relying on free school meals, and after the decision he said on Twitter: "I stand proud today knowing that we have listened, and we have done what is right. The wellbeing of our children should ALWAYS be a priority."

With all that going on, he could have been forgiven for taking his eye off the ball, but he thrived when the Premier League returned. Just as he has become a leader off the pitch, so he has on it, taking Mason Greenwood under his wing as the pair have formed two thirds of a deadly attack alongside Anthony Martial.

When asked about leaders in United's dressing room on the High Performance podcast, manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said: "You have had an example lately in Marcus Rashford – what kind of human being he is, but also a leader. He stepped forward on and off the pitch. He took his first penalty for Man. United ever, added time, PSG, Champions League and he scored it. Marcus is a leader."

The boyhood fan looks likely to be a star of Old Trafford for years to come. Gossip linking him with Paris Saint-Germain and Barcelona need not be taken seriously, at least not for now.

As for his dreams of being a Euro 2020 hero, they are still very much intact. A year later than planned, giving another season to grow, it could work out perfectly for Rashford.

Jamie Evans

Thomas MULLER
Bayern Munich & Germany
The resurrection of the season. Initially out of favour under Niko Kovac, the chance-making machine responded brilliantly under Hansi Flick.

Daniel MUNOZ
Genk & Colombia
Principally a right-back but trusted in several positions, Munoz was the Colombian league's most complete player before moving to Genk in May. Will make his Colombia debut soon.

Vedat MURIQI
Fenerbahce & Kosovo
A tall, powerful and clinical goal poacher, he has been linked with a move to several English clubs including Tottenham and, maybe more credibly, West Bromwich Albion.

Teruhito NAKAGAWA
Yokohama Marinos & Japan
In 2019, Nakagawa won J. League Player Of The Year, the joint-top scorer award – firing Marinos to their first championship since 2004 – and his first two Japan caps.

Samir NASRI
Anderlecht & France
Signed by former team-mate Vincent Kompany but, injury prone, quickly faded from view. Another glum episode in a career that always promised so much.

Jesus NAVAS
Sevilla & Spain
Back at his hometown club after four years in Manchester, and now playing as a right-back under Julen Lopetegui. In January, became the first player to play 500 games for the club.

Ilija NESTOROVSKI
Udinese & North Macedonia
Experienced, imposing left-footed striker, who has done well in four seasons in Italy – three at Palermo – and looks set for a fifth season there.

Manuel NEUER
Bayern Munich & Germany
Class always will out. After suffering no end of problems in 2017 and 2018 with a metatarsal fracture, the sweeper-keeper is now back to his best.

NEYMAR
PSG & Brazil
The Brazil superstar missed most of 2019-20 through injury, but still weighed in with 13 goals and six assists in 15 league games. You can't argue with stats like that.

NGUYEN Quang Hai
Hanoi FC & Vietnam
All Vietnam fans are wondering why one of the best attacking midfielders in Asia has not yet moved to Europe, and where he will end up when he does eventually go.

Mbaye NIANG
Rennes & Senegal
Tipped for big things on joining Milan as a teenager, he is now 25 and making a name for himself once again, scoring 21 Ligue 1 goals since returning in 2018.

Florian NIEDERLECHNER
Augsburg & Germany
Make no mistake, without his enormous contribution, Augsburg would have been relegated. Led from the front with 13 goals and sheer persistence.

Christopher NKUNKU
RB Leipzig & France
An all-day creative marvel thanks to his direct and imaginative style of play. The €13m RB paid PSG for him a year ago already looks like small change.

Jean-Pierre NSAME
Young Boys & Cameroon
A striker with a seemingly magnetic attraction to the ball in the box. After three years with the Bern club, he is keen to seek pastures new.

Jan OBLAK
Atletico Madrid & Slovenia
Widely considered to be the world's best, he kept his 100th La Liga clean sheet in June. Narrowly beaten to his fifth straight Zamora Trophy by Courtois.

Guillermo OCHOA
America & Mexico
After seven years in Europe, he returned to America, the team with whom he first starred. Arguably Mexico's best-ever goalkeeper, he's the undisputed No.1 heading to Qatar.

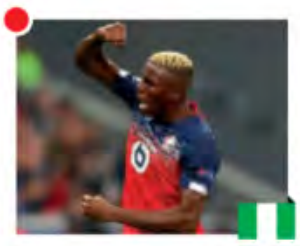
Martin ODEGAARD
Real Sociedad & Norway
Loaned to Real Sociedad for two years and proved his ability in 2019-20. Could be recalled early by Real Madrid depending on Luka Modric's future.

Abdulkadir OMUR
Trabzonspor & Turkey
One of the most exciting young Turkish players in the league, the diminutive and skilful 21-year-old left-footed playmaker has been nicknamed "the Turkish Messi."

Andre ONANA
Ajax & Cameroon
The athletic keeper has his mind set on a transfer, with former club Barcelona competing with Chelsea, Tottenham and Paris Saint-Germain to sign him.

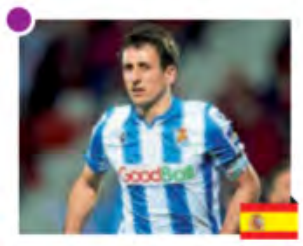
Fabian ORELLANA
Real Valladolid & Chile
Chile international who has played over 230 La Liga games for the likes of Celta Vigo, Valencia and Eibar, but will play for Ronaldo-owned Real Valladolid next season.

Riccardo ORSOLINI
Bologna & Italy
Left-footed Orsolini has done well under Bologna coach Sinisa Mihajlovic, scoring on his debut for Italy in a Euro 2020 qualifier against Armenia in November 2019.



Victor OSIMHEN
Lille & Nigeria
Expected to join Napoli for €80m, less than a year after the 21-year-old left Belgian outfit Charleroi to join Lille, having scored 18 goals in all competitions for the French side.

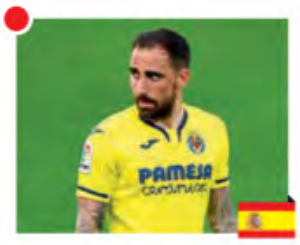
David OSPINA
Napoli & Colombia
Capped 104 times for Colombia, Ospina shares goalkeeping duties with Italy reserve Alex Meret. His vast experience is an obvious plus factor for Napoli.



Mikel OYARZABAL
Real Sociedad & Spain
Kicked on from an impressive 2018-19 to prove himself as one of Spain's best young players. Wanted by most of Europe's elite, including Barcelona and Manchester City.

Mesut OZIL
Arsenal & Germany
What next for the mercurial No.10? With a year remaining on his current £350k-a-week deal, the German has few suitors willing to match his wage demands, so he needs to prove his fitness and desire to Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta.

PABLO Hernandez
Leeds United & Spain
Performed superbly in July to secure Leeds' promotion, just as he has done since 2017. Contracted to 2022, the 35-year-old will remain a key man in the Premier League.



PACO Alcacer
Villarreal & Spain
Began 2019-20 with ten goals in eight games for Borussia Dortmund and Spain, before joining Villarreal for a club-record fee in January. Has a point to prove in La Liga.

Matias PALACIOS
San Lorenzo & Argentina
Nicknamed "The Little Jewel", Palacios made his first division debut aged 16, becoming the youngest player in San Lorenzo's history in the process.

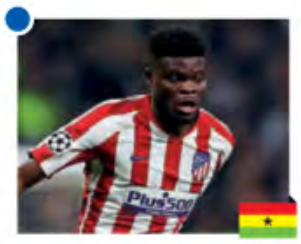
Brayan PALMEZANO
Huachipato & Venezuela
The latest to tread the route from Venezuela to Chile – and well capable of moving on. Tiny left-footed attacking midfielder with strength and skill on the ball.

Goran PANDEV
Genoa & North Macedonia
North Macedonia's captain and record scorer is gifted with a class and technique that remain obvious even in his current Indian summer spell.

Esteban PAREDES
Colo-Colo & Chile
The all-time top scorer of the Chilean first division. Short of world class but a domestic legend still going strong having just turned 40 years old. Stocky striker of rare intelligence, he is currently enjoying his second spell at Colo-Colo.

Dani PAREJO
Valencia & Spain
Valencia club captain in his ninth year at the Mestalla, yet set to leave this summer having been transfer listed by the club. The 31-year-old will not be short of offers.

Troy PARROTT
Tottenham & Republic of Ireland
Tipped to be the long-term replacement for both Harry Kane at club level and Robbie Keane at international, expectations are high for the teenager.



Thomas PARTEY
Atletico Madrid & Ghana
Colossal defensive midfielder known for his aggression, stamina and ball-winning ability. Heavily rumoured to be joining Arsenal in the summer for a fee close to €45m.

Benjamin PAVARD
Bayern Munich & France
Solid, sober and highly-effective right-back or central defender. The 2018 World Cup winner is still dining out on his brilliantly struck goal against Argentina in the last 16.

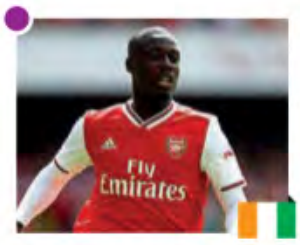
Milan PAVKOV
Red Star Belgrade & Serbia
First came to prominence when he scored twice in Red Star's 2-0 win over Liverpool in 2018. His height makes him a real nuisance.

Strahinja PAVLOVIC
Monaco & Serbia
The commanding 19-year-old has already been likened to ex-Manchester United colossus Nemanja Vidic. Joined Monaco from Partizan Belgrade in June.

Cristian PAVON
LA Galaxy & Argentina
The 24-year-old is on loan from Boca Juniors, with LA Galaxy having the option to make the deal permanent. Has 11 caps for Argentina and played at the 2018 World Cup.

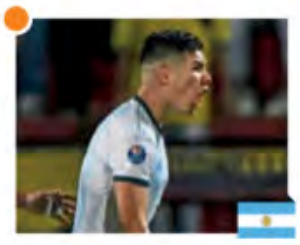
Dimitri PAYET
Marseille & France
An undoubted talent, but often a controversial figure, Payet has, as usual, been both brilliant and baffling all in the space of one season. With a contract at Marseille that runs until 2024 it's unlikely he'll be leaving the club anytime soon.

Facundo PELLISTRI
Penarol & Uruguay
Made a huge impression towards the end of the year playing wide on the right. Fluid on the ball, with a neat turn of pace, two footed and with impressive vision. The 18-year-old looks a real find and is being linked with top European clubs.



Nicolas PEPE
Arsenal & Ivory Coast
Not yet lived up to his £72m price tag, but there have been some encouraging signs, not least June's stunning, curling strike away at Brighton – his eighth goal of the season.

Lucas PEREZ
Deportivo Alaves & Spain
Rediscovered his goalscoring boots in Spain after poor spells with Arsenal and West Ham. In tandem with another Premier League flop, Joselu.

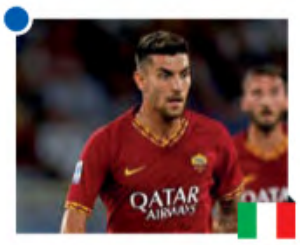


Nehuen PEREZ
Atletico Madrid & Argentina
Showing maturity beyond his years, one of the best defenders in Portugal on loan at Famalicao in 2019-20, and a big reason for their great season.

Andrea PETAGNA
Napoli & Italy
Signed by Napoli in January yet allowed to stay with SPAL for the rest of the season, the big, battling central target man will give the Neapolitans' attack a new dimension.

Jose Luis PALOMINO
Atalanta & Argentina
Tall, tough and mobile defender, now in his third season with Atalanta since leaving Ludogorets in 2017. Has improved greatly, but is still awaiting an international call-up.

Mario PASALIC
Atalanta & Croatia
Signed from Chelsea for €15m in June following a two-year loan and spells at Elche, Monaco, Milan and Spartak Moscow. His best football has been at Atalanta.



Lorenzo PELLEGRINI
Roma & Italy
Pellegrini will be a key cog in both Roberto Mancini's Euro 2020 squad and Roma's first team for years to come. One of the best talents of his generation.

Bruno PETKOVIC
Dinamo Zagreb & Croatia
Big, cunning forward who has filled the gap created by the international retirement of Mario Mandzukic. Five goals in his first eight games for Croatia.

Suphanat MUEANTA
Buriram United & Thailand

Born after the 2002 World Cup, the teenager has not only been hailed as one of the brightest prospects in Southeast Asia but one of the best in the continent as a whole. As well as his goalscoring and confidence, the impressive thing about the attacker is that every time he moves up a level he looks comfortable.

It helps that he plays for Southeast Asia's best club Buriram United, where success is expected and demanded. In 2018, he became the youngest player to feature in the Thai Premier League, aged just 15, and was soon the youngest ever to score in the best league in the region. Buriram fans like a little flair and they are growing to love this forward.

"The Wonder Kid" as he is known, cuts a slight figure but has become a favourite due to his close control, ability to beat defenders and composure in front of goal.

It was in 2019 when he really established himself with Buriram, scoring eight goals as the team missed out on the title on goal difference.

In the same year he shone in Asia, becoming the youngest-ever goalscorer in the AFC Champions League as he netted against Beijing Guoan – no surprise that there has been interest from China. Later in 2019, he then represented Thailand. "He has what it takes to go all the way," said then Thai boss Sirisak Yodyardthai. "He just needs to keep doing what he is doing as he is an exciting talent."

Unsurprisingly all this has made the forward quite the star in his homeland. He has already established himself as a major star in one of Southeast Asia's top teams. It is easy to forget that he has only just turned 18 and last year was top scorer during qualification for Asia's Under-19 Championship.

Also unsurprising is the emergence of a debate as to when and where he should go when the call from Europe comes or whether he should go to Japan first. Thai players don't have the best record in the west but if anybody could change that, maybe Mueanta could.

John Duerden

Lucas OCAMPOS

Sevilla & Argentina

When Sevilla signed Lucas Ocampos in the summer of 2019, they thought they were welcoming an exciting new winger for their squad. Little did they know that they were also landing a solid replacement goalkeeper.

In the club's crucial midnight kick-off with Eibar in June, the Argentina international had already scored the only goal of the game, before goalkeeper Tomas Vaclik was forced off with an injury late on.

Having already made all their substitutions, Ocampos was forced to go in goal – and ended up becoming the first player to score and make a save in a top-five European league game since 2017, winning his side three vital points.

His last-minute stop from Eibar goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic, up for a stoppage-time set-piece, was later described on Sevilla's website as "a script that couldn't be written", yet Ocampos' heroics felt somewhat inevitable – such as his 2019-20 has played out.

He was brought in from Marseille for €15 million after being scouted by Sevilla's director of football Monchi – a man known for his eye for talent. Ocampos had managed four goals and seven assists in 2018-19, playing from the left wing for the French club.

Nevertheless, Sevilla coach Julen Lopetegui decided he'd be better off working from the right – a decision that proved a masterstroke. His partnership with Jesus Navas – now playing as a right-back – flourished immediately, and the winger ended 2019 with more goal involvements than any other team-mate.

His efforts didn't go unnoticed by Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, either – Ocampos was given his international debut in October against Germany, coming off the bench to score a late equaliser.

His form continued into the New Year, as he became the first Sevilla player to score in five consecutive matches since 2011, concluding with a goal against eternal rivals Real Betis in La Liga's curtain-raiser post-lockdown.

He finished the 2019-20 campaign with 17 league goals and assists combined, and as the club's top goalscorer and best performer. As a key reason for Sevilla's inclusion in next season's Champions League, he's ready to flaunt his talent at the highest possible level.

Jared Tinslay

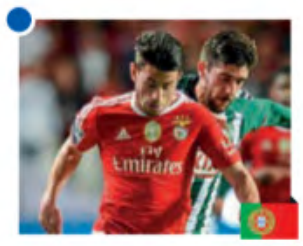
Maximilian PHILIPP
Dynamo Moscow & Germany
Unable to find a place at Dortmund, the versatile forward made a surprise switch to Russia last year. Pacy, two-footed and full of movement.

Jordan PICKFORD
Everton & England
Currently clinging to his place in the England team by virtue of his superior kicking, he must rediscover the shot-stopping ability that made him such a hero at Sunderland.

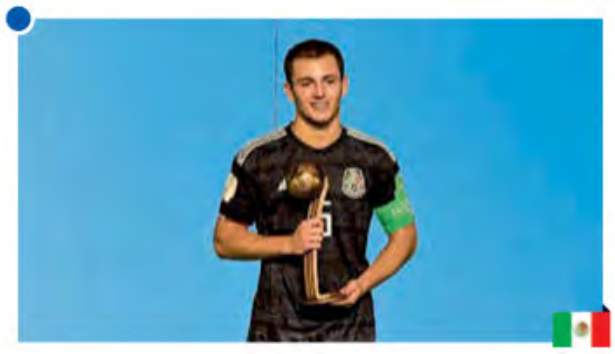
Cesar PINARES
Universidad Catolica & Chile
Playmaker who moved to Italy as a teenager and fell short of expectations. Now playing his best football and has forced his way into the national team.

Carlos PINEDA
Olimpia & Honduras
At 22, likely to be key to Honduras' future. Defensive midfielder, scored the goal which took Olimpia to the CONCACAF Champions League quarter-finals.

Gerard PIQUE
Barcelona & Spain
Remains constant at the heart of Barca's defence while his partner changes from week to week. Aged 33 but, having retired from international duty, has many years ahead.



PIZZI
Benfica & Portugal
With a remarkable return of 29 goals from 47 matches, the versatile midfielder has been a model of consistency in a largely forgettable season for the Eagles.



Eugenio PIZZUTO
Pachuca & Mexico
An unusual start to his career saw him spend three years in New Zealand with Wellington Phoenix before joining Pachuca. Bronze Ball winner in the last U17 World Cup, he has been consistently linked with a transfer to Lille.

Alassane PLEA
Borussia M'Gladbach & France
Just as capable of providing a delicious assist as sealing the deal in the penalty area. Reportedly watched by Arsenal and Tottenham.

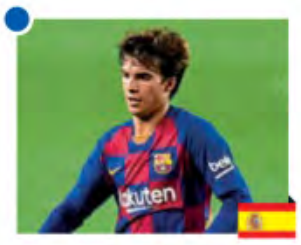
Paul POGBA
Man. United & France
Thrived at Juve next to Andrea Pirlo and Arturo Vidal, and won the World Cup with Griezmann, Mbappe et al, the immensely talented Pogba works best with the spotlight elsewhere. Bruno Fernandes' arrival could be perfect for him.

Paxton POMYKAL
FC Dallas & USA
Another graduate of FC Dallas' academy. Midfield playmaker who captained the USA in the 2019 U20 World Cup, and already a Dallas regular aged 20.

Marin PONGRACIC
Wolfsburg & Croatia
A mid-season acquisition from RB Salzburg, he wasted no time finding his feet in the Bundesliga. So much so that Bayern Munich are seriously scouting him.

Cristian PORTU
Real Sociedad & Spain
Signed from Girona in 2019 and had an immediate impact with 19 goals and assists combined in his first season. Works hard and a fan favourite for it.

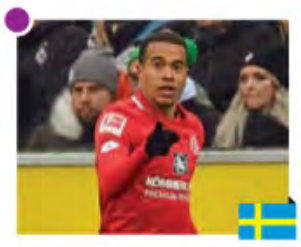
Quincy PROMES
Ajax & Netherlands
Having been rejected by Ajax as a teenager, he returned last year with much more maturity after four years at Spartak Moscow and one at Sevilla. With 12 goals in 20 matches in 2019-20, he often finished off Hakim Ziyech's set-plays.



Riqui PUIG
Barcelona & Spain
Diminutive *La Masia* product who was handed first-team chances in June and July, and impressed with his creativity. Could run Barca's midfield for years.

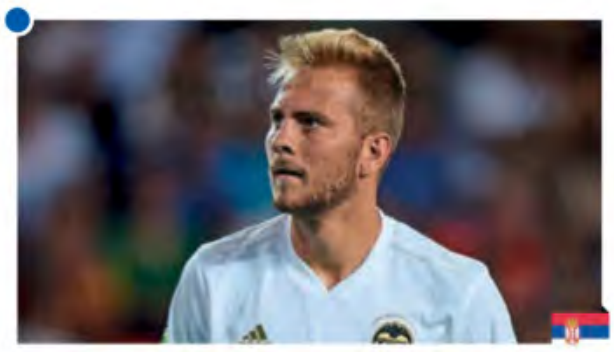
Christian PULISIC
Chelsea & USA
One of the Premier League's most in-form players after lockdown, adding goals and assists. Encouraging first full season for USA's most naturally talented player.

Fabio QUAGLIARELLA
Sampdoria & Italy
2018-19's leading goalscorer with 26 goals has extended his contract with Samp, in spite of his 37 years. Monumental figure in Italian football.



Robin QUAISON
Mainz & Sweden
Busy, predatorial striker or left winger who played a key role in keeping Mainz in the Bundesliga. Insistent not so long ago he should only be used in the centre of midfield.

Eduardo QUARESMA
Sporting & Portugal
Thrust into Sporting's back three by new coach Ruben Amorim, the 18-year-old Quaresma took to senior football like a seasoned professional. Huge potential.



Uros RACIC
Valencia & Serbia
Another of Famalicao's loanees, the imposing Serbian lends class and muscle to the midfield of the overachieving Portuguese team, with eye-catching raking passes a feature of his game. What Valencia will do with him next is unclear.

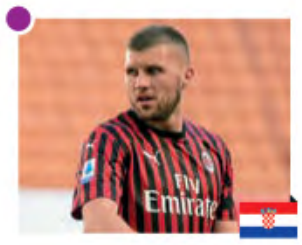
Predrag RAJKOVIC
Reims & Serbia
The 24-year-old was a big part of unfancied Reims' sensational performance in finishing sixth in Ligue 1 in 2019-20, with 12 clean sheets in 27 appearances.

Jeizon RAMIREZ
Real Salt Lake & Venezuela
Signed from Deportivo Tachira in Venezuela, the 19-year-old was immediately given Designated Player status, allowing Real to boost his salary.

Sergio RAMOS
Real Madrid & Spain
The Spanish title-winning captain broke Ronald Koeman's La Liga scoring record for a defender with his 68th goal and finished the season with a career-best tally of 11, while also marshalling the tightest defence in the league. Not bad.

Megan RAPINOE
OL Reign & USA
Hasn't played since March, yet still one of the most influential voices in the game. Prominent in the BLM protests and outspoken in demanding equality for the USWNT.

Milot RASHICA
Werder Bremen & Kosovo
Classy 24-year-old winger who can effortlessly put the ball into the net with either foot. Having helped keep Bremen up, he is likely to quit the Weserstadion, with plenty of interested parties including RB Leipzig, Milan, Liverpool and Wolves.



Ante REBIC
Milan & Croatia
Bought from Eintracht Frankfurt last summer, Rebic went largely ignored until January, when he scored two goals as a sub in a 3-2 win against Udinese. Has shone since then.

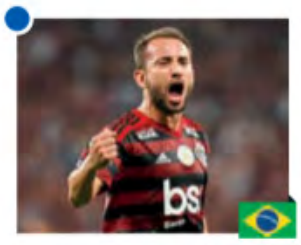
Sergio REGUILON
Real Madrid & Spain
Loaned to Sevilla for 2019-20 and proved he has what it takes to compete in La Liga. Could contend with Marcelo for a spot in Real's first-team next season.

Jeff REINE-ADELAIDE
Lyon & France
Following his €25m move from Angers, the France U21 international was having a very impressive season until a cruciate ligament injury in December put paid to his campaign. He'll be looking to bounce back quickly in 2020-21.

Wendie RENARD
Lyon Feminin & France
Captain of one of the most dominant sides in world sport, Renard has won 12 league titles in a row and six Champions Leagues, scoring almost 100 goals on the way.

Marco REUS
Borussia Dortmund & Germany
Always good for plenty of goals and assists, the Dortmund skipper has lost none of his ability to make things happen. His one fault? Constant injury woes.

Giovanni REYNA
Borussia Dortmund & USA
The 17-year-old son of US soccer legend, Claudio, already has the mindset of an experienced pro, plus the attributes of a grade A winger.



Everton RIBEIRO
Flamengo & Brazil
Subtle left-footer who dictates the rhythm of Flamengo's play with intelligent prompting. Made the surprising choice to spend some of his peak years in the United Arab Emirates.

Franck RIBERY
Fiorentina & France
Left Bayern Munich in 2019 after 12 years, and now enjoying the Indian summer of a great career. Even at the age of 37, he is still dynamic, and determined to go out in style by contributing to the construction of a bold new Fiorentina.

Declan RICE
West Ham & England
Now settled in the middle after switching between defence and midfield for the last two years. In demand, yet West Ham's £70m asking price is unlikely to be met this year.

RICHARLISON
Everton & Brazil
Many onlookers were stunned when Everton reportedly turned down an £85m offer for the winger, but his record for Brazil suggests that maybe he is worth the fee.

Andy ROBERTSON
Liverpool & Scotland
Often credited for his rapid rise, but forget where he's come from and focus on where he's going. One of the world's best left-backs has many years at the top ahead of him.

Miles ROBINSON
Atlanta United & USA
A basketball star in high school, Robinson brings height, speed and exceptional agility. He played in all 34 of Atlanta's games in 2019, and was named in the MLS Best XI.

Marc ROCA
Espanyol & Spain
Made his 100th La Liga appearance in the game that saw Espanyol relegated. Highly likely to leave this summer, with Real Madrid believed to be interested.

RODRI
Man. City & Spain
Not a seamless transition to the Premier League, but enough to suggest that the Busquets-lookalike can improve further, particularly under Guardiola's tutelage.

RODRIGO
Valencia & Spain
Striker or winger who top-scored for Spain in qualifying for Euro 2020, but struggled for goals in La Liga in 2019-20. Only found the net four times, but provided seven assists.

Angel RODRIGUEZ
Getafe & Spain
Veteran striker who was tipped to join Barcelona before Martin Braithwaite made the move, and didn't celebrate when he scored against them in February.

Jadon SANCHO
Borussia Dortmund & England

The consensus of opinion in German media circles is that the London-born winger is God's gift to the Bundesliga. Not only the most extravagantly-gifted player in the country, but also within a hair's breadth of becoming a fully-fledged world-class performer. That's an awful lot of hype to heap on a fledgling pro. But the evidence is that the wall-to-wall praise is perfectly justified. By any metric, Sancho is an absolute natural, a Generation Z tyro brimming over with speed, ball skills, firepower and bursts of pure genius.

In the Bundesliga in 2019-20, he offered treats to a wide variety of constituents. Fans who put a premium on attacking spectacle and fireworks cannot get enough of his virtuosity. Number-crunchers are happy to hang their hats on his statistical output - 17 goals and 16 assists in the Bundesliga, with Lionel Messi the only other player to get more than 15 of each in Europe's top five leagues.

Youngsters with a social conscience will have appreciated his recent support for the "Black Lives Matter" movement, dedicating a goal against Paderborn to George Floyd, the Minneapolis man who was killed during his ill-fated arrest, a white police officer kneeling on his neck for several minutes.

Inevitably, for someone so young, Jadon's 2019-20 resume does include the odd *faux pas*. In Dortmund's 4-0 thumping at Bayern in November, he was so ineffectual that he was taken off only 36 minutes into the game, and last autumn he was dropped by his club for returning late from England duty.

The all-important question is whether this, his third campaign with Dortmund, will be his last. Tracked by a gaggle of Europe's top clubs, he is thought to be keen on a return to England, with a move to Manchester United a strong possibility. Dortmund, of course, will not give him up easily. Any would-be buyer will have to pay at least €130m, and Dortmund secretly hope that such a hefty price tag will scare off the raiders in these perilous economic times.

When asked about his future in last month's issue of *World Soccer*, the youngster played a straight bat: "I don't know what to say to that. It's hard to say. That's the future. You never know what could happen, so we will wait and see." Indeed we will.

Wherever Sancho does play his football next season, he can be sure of a place in the England squad for Euro 2020. A starting spot is less certain, with Gareth Southgate assembling a dynamic and dangerous front line, with intense competition for places.

Shifting one of Marcus Rashford, Raheem Sterling and Harry Kane will be a difficult task, but the thought of Europe's most dangerous dribbler emerging from the bench to run at tiring legs should fill any England fan with hope - and opponents with dread.

Nick Bidwell

Carlos RODRIGUEZ
Monterrey & Mexico
Tireless midfielder who exploded out of nowhere in the 2018-19 season, to the point of becoming an undisputed starter for Mexico. Caught the eye with a great performance against Liverpool in December's Club World Cup.

Jonathan RODRIGUEZ
Cruz Azul & Uruguay
Uruguay striker who has built a good reputation in Mexico after a disappointing stint in Europe with Benfica and then Deportivo La Coruna. He was the leading goalscorer in the Clausura 2020 before it was suspended in March.

RODRYGO
Real Madrid & Brazil
Teenager who scored his first senior goal within a minute of coming on last year, becoming the first player born this century to score for *Los Blancos*.

Luka ROMERO
Mallorca & Mexico
Wrote himself into the history books by becoming the youngest player to appear in a La Liga match at just 15 years and 219 days old against Real Madrid.

Valentin RONGIER
Marseille & France
A €13m deadline-day signing proved to be money well spent as the 25-year-old helped his new side reach the Champions League for the first time since 2013.

Wayne ROONEY
Derby County & England
Derby were 17th when Rooney arrived in January, yet ended the season just short of the play-offs. Still has the class to pull the strings at that level.

Diego ROSSI
Los Angeles FC & Uruguay
Many of Rossi's goals for LAFC have been the result of an exciting partnership with Carlos Vela. Thanks to the pair, LAFC were the top scorers in MLS in 2019.

Marcel RUIZ
Club Tijuana & Mexico
Elegant midfielder has impressed since his debut at 17. His recent move to Tijuana is likely to be a stepping stone to a lucrative European transfer next summer.

Cristiano RONALDO

Juventus & Portugal

A quarter of an hour from the end of Juve's fifth game back after the COVID lockdown, a 3-1 away win against Genoa on June 30, Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri opted to substitute his main man.

All eyes were on the touchline as Cristiano Ronaldo made his exit. How will the two men salute one another? After all, the previous two weeks had appeared to indicate tensions between the two. After Juve's Coppa Italia final defeat by Napoli in mid-June – an unusual event in itself – Ronaldo's sister Elma Alverio had been critical of Sarri on social media, implying that her famous brother had been blocked by Sarri's tactics.

You cannot ask Ronaldo to play as the central striker, he has got to start on the wing, be it left or right. Many Juventus fans would agree. In the end, against Napoli in that final and against both Bologna and Lecce in Serie A, both Juventus and Ronaldo had looked below par, not yet up to full match fitness.

Nothing unusual in that, but Juve's 3-1 drubbing of Genoa suggested that both the Old Lady and her superstar had resumed normal service. Looking sharp in attack, Ronaldo forced three good saves from Genoa keeper Matteo Perin before scoring Juve's second goal of the night with a long-range humdinger that gave the Genoa keeper no chance.

So, how did he salute Sarri as he came off? It was all smiles and high-fives. The reality about Cristiano Ronaldo since he arrived in Italy two years ago, is that everything he does, every gesture he makes, every goal he scores, or indeed does not score, is underlined, highlighted, interpreted and over-analysed.

Does he still have the hunger, are his 35 years beginning to make themselves felt, can he hoist the Old Lady onto his shoulders one final time and lead them to a Champions League trophy this summer? In the end, the latter is arguably the only question that matters. Given the Portuguese ace's current form, his maniacal fitness obsession and his overall professionalism, this is by no means impossible. After all, that is why Juventus bought him.

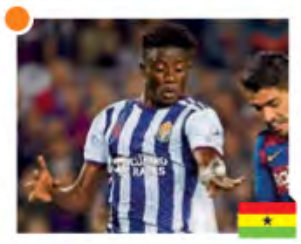
Paddy Agnew

Marcel SABITZER
RB Leipzig & Austria
Clever and consistent playmaker, who for some reason tends to be underestimated. RB coach Julian Nagelsmann says he is a guaranteed starter. Enough said.

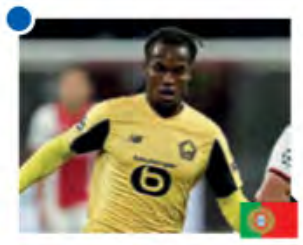
Bukayo SAKA
Arsenal & England
Primarily a winger of rich skill, Saka has excelled at full-back. An England call-up won't just be to see off interest from Nigeria – Saka is a contender for Euro 2020.

Mo SALAH
Liverpool & Egypt
Don't take his brilliance for granted – Salah is close to a century of goals in three seasons at Liverpool, and is just the fourth Red to be directly involved in 100 Premier League goals.

William SALIBA
Arsenal & France
Signing secured last summer and, while he may only be 19, his arrival couldn't come quickly enough for Arsenal fans after witnessing their defensive woes.



Mohammed SALISU
Southampton & Ghana
One of La Liga's best young defenders in 2019-20, he was the most expensive departure in Real Valladolid's history when he left for £10.9m in July.



Renato SANCHES
Lille & Portugal
The much-touted Portugal international failed to make the grade at Bayern, but appears to have found his home in northern France since arriving for €20m last year.

Jhon Jairo SANCHEZ
Independiente del Valle & Ecuador
The revelation of last year, a key part of the Copa Sudamericana triumph, cutting in from the left to use his right foot. Has found 2020 much harder.

Leroy SANE
Bayern Munich & Germany
A move that probably suited all parties, joining Bayern will allow Sane to become a talismanic figure in his home country, while Man. City can reinvest.

Roque SANTA CRUZ
Olimpia & Paraguay
Mind-boggling to think what he might have achieved without the injuries. Ended last year in superb form, he would love to make an impact on this year's Copa Libertadores.

Rafael SANTOS BORRE
River Plate & Colombia
Joint-top scorer in the Argentinian Superliga in 2019-20, and now "ready for Europe", according to former Argentina international Hernan Crespo.

SAUL Niguez
Atletico Madrid & Spain
The box-to-box midfielder teased rival fans by announcing he had a "new club" on social media, only to reveal a new academy project set up in his hometown of Elche.

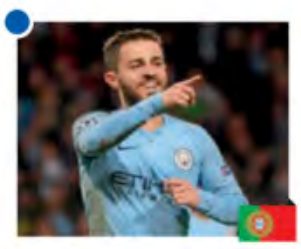
Teji SAVANIER
Montpellier & France
It cost Montpellier €9.5m to bring the combative midfielder back home, eight years after releasing him as a teenager. Now the vital cog in the heart of midfield.

Patrik SCHICK
RB Leipzig & Czech Republic
On loan from Roma, the Czech striker lived up to expectations, with selflessness, sharpness and a delicate touch. RB can sign him for €29m.

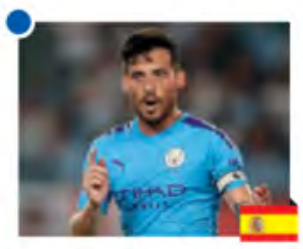
Suat SERDAR
Schalke & Germany
Just a year ago after a disappointing first season with Schalke, many were gunning for him. But now he is winning rave reviews for his goals and work-ethic.

Wei SHIHAO
Guangzhou Evergrande & China
A nomadic career that has taken in Boavista as well as the CSL's best sides – Shanghai SIPG, Beijing Guoan and Guangzhou – he is yet to hit his potential.

Eldor SHOMURODOV
Rostov & Uzbekistan
Towering Uzbek target man who uses his skyscraper build to dominate in the air. He is no slouch on the ground either, as his assist stats testify.



Bernardo SILVA
Man. City & Portugal
With excellent balance, a delicious left foot and impeccable vision, the future of both Manchester City and Portugal is in safe hands with the versatile midfielder.



David SILVA
Man. City & Spain
While his next club is unclear, there is no doubt that Silva will go down as one of the Premier League's greatest imports. Still capable of excelling at the highest level.

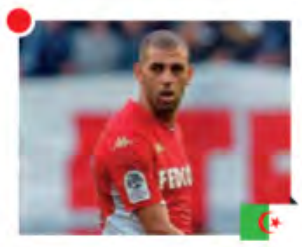
Rafa SILVA
Benfica & Portugal
Electric winger who has terrorised defences throughout his career and has added end product to his game. Arguably the most potent weapon in Portugal.

Moses SIMON
Nantes & Nigeria
Joined Nantes on loan from Levante last summer and earned himself a permanent deal 12 months later by scoring nine goals and assisting eight in 30 games.

Unai SIMON
Athletic Bilbao & Spain
Young Basque keeper who could follow in the footsteps of Kepa by agreeing a big-money move to one of Europe's elite clubs this summer. Athletic want to keep him.

Christine SINCLAIR
Portland Thorns & Canada
With 186 goals in 296 games, the 37-year-old is the top-scoring and most-capped international footballer of all time – what else is there to say?

Salvatore SIRIGU
Torino & Italy
An impressive season from ex-PSG player Sirigu has reportedly attracted much interest. Likely to be the reserve goalkeeper in Italy's squad at the Euros.



Islam SLIMANI
Leicester & Algeria
Loaned out multiple times by Leicester – at Newcastle and Fenerbahce before settling in Monaco. Bonded with Wissam Ben Yedder, but his future is uncertain.

Chris SMALLING
Roma & England
Following a successful first season, Smalling is set for another year on loan from Manchester United. His resolute defensive displays have won many plaudits, and left some English teams wondering whether they should have signed him themselves.

Filipe SOARES
Moreirense & Portugal
Adaptable, busy, energetic player, who has amassed over 70 senior appearances in a variety of positions despite only recently turning 21. Primed for a step up.

Aleksandr SOBOLEV
Spartak Moscow & Russia
A bicycle-kick specialist shaping up to be the best finisher of his generation. Joined Spartak in May after a successful loan spell from Krylia Sovetov.

SON Heung-min
Tottenham & South Korea
Asia's best player in three of the last five years, Jose Mourinho prefers to see his speed, endeavour and movement on the wing rather than up front.

Alexander SORLOTH
Trabzonspor & Norway
On loan from Crystal Palace until 2021, the big, mobile striker put his Premier League struggles behind him to become Turkey's top scorer, propelling Trabzonspor's title bid.

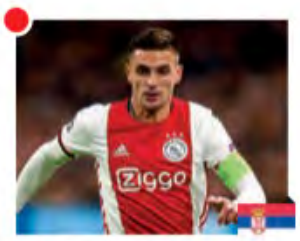
Guillermo SOTO
Palestino & Chile
Attacking right-back who came through last year. End product can improve, but has put himself in contention to be Mauricio Isla's long-term replacement for the national side.

Calvin STENGS
AZ Alkmaar & Netherlands
Came through the ranks of AZ and is hard to defend against. Made his debut at 18, but was ruled out for 14 months with a cruciate ligament injury. Made his international debut last year, getting two assists in a 5-0 win against Estonia.

John STONES
Man. City & England
The 26-year-old still hasn't eradicated the mistakes that blight his game. Facing a crossroad this summer having slipped from first choice at City, but on his day a class act.

Luis SUAREZ
Barcelona & Uruguay
Boisterous striker who likely has one more season before he looks for his final challenge, with Barca hunting his replacement. Still one of the best finishers in the game.

Neven SUBOTIC
Union Berlin & Serbia
The Serb centre-back might have lost a step or two since starring for Jurgen Klopp's Dortmund, but his combative streak and eye for danger are still intact.



Dusan TADIC
Ajax & Serbia
The 31-year-old architect of Ajax's attacks would be useful for any top club and only has one more year on his contract, but wants to stay in Amsterdam.

Adam TAGGART
Suwon Samsung Bluewings & Australia
The K-League's top goalscorer in 2019 probably would have left had the transfer market not been hit by coronavirus. Interest from China.

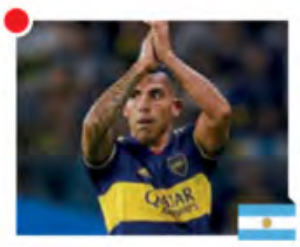
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO
Ajax & Argentina
Ajax offered to renew his contract but he wants to move. PSG and Chelsea are the main contenders, with Arsenal, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid also interested.

TAISON
Shakhtar Donetsk & Brazil
After seven-and-a-half seasons with Shakhtar, the gifted 32-year-old is keen to return to his native Brazil to play for old club Internacional.

Ao TANAKA
Kawasaki Frontale & Japan
The free-running defensive midfielder seized his chance at Frontale in 2019, and was named the J. League's best young player. Man of the match for Japan U22 against England in Toulon last summer, and won his first full cap in December.

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN
Barcelona & Germany
The Germany goalkeeper saved Barcelona on numerous occasions this season, provided two assists and recorded a new personal best for minutes without conceding. Still second choice to Manuel Neuer at international level though.

TETE
Shakhtar Donetsk & Brazil
Tete does a fine Arjen Robben imitation, cutting in from the right to score with his left foot. No senior experience before signing in 2019.



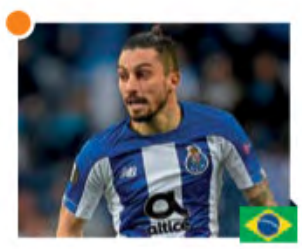
Carlos TEVEZ
Boca Juniors & Argentina
At 36, Tevez remains one of Argentina's most talked about players. The reigning champions' top scorer is wrestling over a new contract extension.

Anirudh THAPA
Chennaiyin & India
Already an established member of an increasingly successful India team, this tidy and hard-working 22-year-old midfielder has an eye for a pass and a bright future.

Florian THAUVIN
Marseille & France
Since returning from Newcastle, Thauvin has become a France international and OM's third-top scorer of all time. Ankle injury restricted him to one appearance in 2020.

Yeferson SOTELDO
Santos & Venezuela
Beautifully balanced with delicious close skills. Starred in Chile before moving to Brazil. A key part of Venezuela's hopes of making their World Cup debut in Qatar.

Dominik SZOBOSZLAI
RB Salzburg & Hungary
The word on the street in Mozart City is the cultured midfielder is about to exit stage left, with Milan poised to pay the €25m asking price for him.



Alex TELLES
Porto & Brazil
Fired Porto to the title from left-back, scoring double figures and collecting plenty of assists. Also highly proficient in defence, he will be sold for a big fee this summer.

THIAGO Alcantara
Bayern Munich & Spain
Engine-room controller with an extraordinary skill-set, he bizarrely lost his mojo in 2020. Apparently told his team-mates he is heading for the exit in order to join Liverpool.

Raheem STERLING

Man. City & England

For a 25-year-old, Sterling has packed a lot into his career. As well as over 250 Premier League games, 56 England caps, and three major tournaments, he has gone from a regular target of boos to one of British sport's most popular figures.

Partly, this is due to his character off the pitch. Sterling is naturally warm and fun, if a little shy, making his critics in tabloid newspapers hard to stomach. He has shown bravery in standing up to these attacks, while also speaking out on a wide range of subjects, from racism in football to the Grenfell Tower fire.

On the pitch, he has matured into one of Europe's most dangerous forwards. Integral to England's 2018 World Cup campaign, he worked selflessly to allow Gareth Southgate's 3-5-2 system to flourish. The only thing missing was a goal, with the tournament extending his international drought to three years.

He ended the long wait for an England goal in style, scoring twice to inspire an historic 3-2 win over Spain in Seville.

It was the beginning of a new chapter for England, setting them on a journey that would take in qualification for the inaugural UEFA Nations League and Euro 2020. At next summer's tournament, Sterling will be one of England's most influential players.

He has come a long way since bursting onto the scene as a teenager at Liverpool. Nurtured by then-manager Brendan Rodgers, he was a bundle of energy, bravery and enthusiasm. Every time he got on the ball he tried to make things happen, tormenting full-backs for fun.

As he has developed, his game has become as much about what he does without the ball as with it. He showed glimpses of this at Anfield, where his runs beyond Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge were vital to Liverpool's title challenge in 2013-14. He has pace and energy, but also intelligence and good timing. He listens to his coaches, and makes the movements they ask him to. That's why he did well for Rodgers, and has flourished under Pep Guardiola.

For Pep, the role of wingers is key. They must hug the touchline to make the pitch as wide as possible, then make the difference in the area.

That, in a nutshell, has been Sterling's game for the last three years, and has seen him score over 20 goals in all competitions each season. He is not among the Premier League's top ten dribblers, but relies on his understanding of space to ghost into the right positions. He is often a clumsy finisher, but as the vast majority of his goals come inside the penalty area, that doesn't matter. The hard work has been done in the build-up - all he has to do is bundle it over the line.

Having grown up in the shadow of the Wembley arch, playing for Engand matters to Sterling more than most. He would love nothing better than to be there next summer, with his hands on the Euro 2020 trophy.

Jamie Evans

Mehdi TAREMI

Rio Ave & Iran

"I mean no disrespect to Rio Ave or the Portuguese league, but Mehdi's a player for a bigger stage," said Rio Ave coach Carlos Carvalhal at the start of the season. One year down the line, it is difficult to argue with the well-travelled manager's glowing appraisal of the Iranian striker.

Taremi scored a hat-trick in his first start against Desportivo das Aves on August 23 and has not looked back since, averaging a goal every two games for the modest club from the north of Portugal. Lending further credence to Carvalhal's words has been Taremi's consistently excellent displays in the big matches. He scored against Porto, Benfica and Braga, and tormented Sporting without finding the net.

Iran is not exactly renowned as a hotbed of football talent, so Taremi's arrival in the Primeira Liga aroused curiosity. The striker's exceptional goalscoring record in his home country and then in Qatar suggested he could do well in Europe. The regularity with which he found the net and his all-round quality for the national team left Iran's former Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz in little doubt that he could thrive at a higher level.

"I came here because of Carlos Queiroz. He told me Portugal would be good for me, both in terms of the way of life and the football," says the softly spoken forward. "And he was right. Portuguese people are very friendly and Rio Ave is a family club. This is very important for a player coming from Asia."

Modest and self-effacing off the pitch, Taremi exudes class and intelligence on it, but allied to his elegant style is a lethal streak. Tall and athletic, he uses his body well, but it is his two-footedness, technique and composure in front of goal that makes him such a danger.

His trickery and quick feet make him especially dangerous in the opposition box, as Sporting's experienced centre-back Sebastian Coates found to his cost. The red card the Uruguayan international was shown in a 3-2 home defeat to Rio Ave was something of a show of mercy by the referee after Taremi had made it a traumatic night for the defender. Coates trooped off the pitch having given away three penalties, all to Taremi.

There was no let-up in Taremi's output after the interruption caused by COVID-19. Indeed, the forward seemed invigorated, scoring eight goals in nine matches after returning. Such has been his impact, it will be little surprise if Carvalhal's words prove prophetic, and the striker moves to one of Europe's top leagues for 2020-21.

Tom Kundert

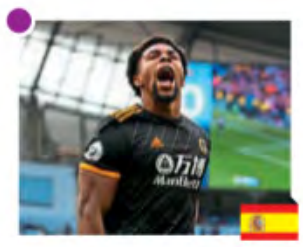
Marcus THURAM
Borussia M'Gladbach & France
The son of French defensive legend Lilian Thuram. In contrast to his father, Marcus makes his presence felt as a speedy and powerful striker.

Sandro TONALI
Brescia & Italy
Bright young Italian talent and widely dubbed the "New Pirlo", he could be Serie A's big summer transfer, possibly to Inter. Already has three caps for Italy.

Ferran TORRES
Valencia & Spain
One of the most exciting young Spanish talents, Torres is likely to be on the move this summer. His contract runs out in 2021, so clubs will look to force Valencia's hand.

Pau TORRES
Villarreal & Spain
The centre-back was clocked as the fastest defender in La Liga in 2019-20, and has numerous potential suitors in the likes of Barcelona, Chelsea and Man. United.

Mohamed TOURE
Adelaide United & Guinea
Toure exploded onto the scene, aged 16, when he became the A-League's youngest-ever goalscorer. He and his brother, Al Hassan, are attracting interest.

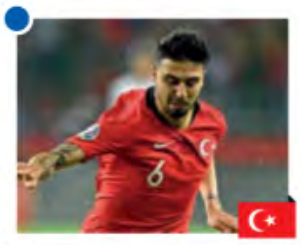


Adama TRAORE
Wolves & Spain
Incredible specimen with arms of a bodybuilder, speed of a sprinter, and a tap dancer's quick feet. Links superbly with Raul Jimenez, assisting almost half his goals.

Francisco TRINCAO
Barcelona & Portugal
Barcelona splashed out €31m to sign the winger back in January, then immediately loaned him back to Braga. Responded with some scintillating form, firing the club into the top four, suggesting that it is money well spent for the Spanish giants.

Kostas TSIMIKAS
Olympiakos & Greece
Pacy, attack-minded left-back with assists in the league and in Europe this season. The 24-year-old is being linked to several Premier League clubs as well as Napoli.

Viktor TSYHANKOV
Dynamo Kiev & Ukraine
With the speed and natural ability to outstrip and outsmart defenders on either wing, the 22-year-old Ukraine national team ace cuts a very conspicuous figure. Born in Israel, where his father Vitaliy played pro football.



Ozan TUFAN
Fenerbahce & Turkey
Talented, versatile, but often frustrating, Tufan has finally matured and beginning to fulfill his potential. Scoring, assisting, defending, and generally pulling the strings in midfield.

Christos TZOLIS
PAOK & Greece
Having just turned 18, Tzolis has only played a handful of games for PAOK, but the skilful winger is already being touted for big things for club and country.

Manfred UGALDE
Deportivo Saprissa & Costa Rica
A tiny yet powerful centre-forward who will probably go to MLS before looking for a transfer to Europe, possibly via the City Football Group.

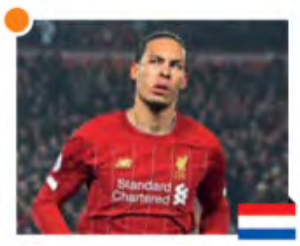
Manuel UGARTE
CA Fenix & Uruguay
Holding midfielder of striking maturity. The 19-year-old dominates space, wins tackles and distributes quickly, and was a huge success at the South American U23 Championship in February, scoring with a long-range shot against Brazil.

Dayot UPAMECANO
RB Leipzig & France
U21 international who cannot be far away from a full call-up. Both athletic and smooth in possesion, he is reportedly wanted by Arsenal, Chelsea and Bayern Munich.

Agustin URZI
Banfield & Argentina
Skilful and audacious forward who plays wide left. Nicknamed the "Poodle", he impressed with Argentina's U20 and U23s, and during lockdown showed off his skills on Instagram.

Federico VALVERDE
Real Madrid & Uruguay
One of the success stories of Zidane's second spell in charge of Real has been the development of Valverde. His energy has been key to their success.

Donny VAN DE BEEK
Ajax & Netherlands
The 23-year-old was on his way to Real Madrid in a €50m deal before COVID-19. With the Spaniards unwilling to pay that fee, Manchester United may swoop in.



Virgil VAN DIJK
Liverpool & Netherlands
Doesn't wear the captain's armband at Anfield but a natural leader nonetheless. Few players have had as big an influence on Liverpool's success in the last two years.

Zinho VANHEUSDEN
Standard Liege & Belgium
Started at Standard then left for Internazionale, before returning to Belgium, first on loan then for a club record €12.5m. Now, Inter want him back. A classy centre-back, combines excellent positioning and anticipation with sound technique.

Raphael VARANE
Real Madrid & France
The dominance of the defence set Real Madrid apart from their challengers in 2019-20. The France defender has again proved why he's so highly rated.

Jamie VARDY
Leicester & England
Refined his energetic style to become more clinical, and rewarded with one of his most prolific seasons. The latest inductee into the Premier League 100 Club.

Fausto VERA
Argentinos Juniors & Argentina
Highly-rated classy central midfielder at Argentinos Juniors, the club where Diego Maradona and Juan Roman Riquelme both started out. Already a regular in the first team and for Argentina U20s, a promising future awaits.

Marco VERRATTI
PSG & Italy
The Italy international has been one of Ligue 1's most consistent performers since arriving from Pescara back in 2012. A pivotal player throughout PSG's domination.

Yari VERSCHAEREN
Anderlecht & Belgium
A product of Anderlecht's impressive youth academy and, at 19, a mainstay in the senior team as an attacking midfielder. Intelligent, two-footed, agile and dominant in possession. A great future ahead, and unlikely to stay in Belgium for long.

Domagoj VIDA
Besiktas & Croatia
A World Cup finalist in 2018, he's been one of the Turkish league's best and most reliable defenders over the past three seasons but Besiktas may now be keen to cash in.

Matias VINA
Palmeiras & Uruguay
Tall, classy defender signed from Nacional who has quickly shown the qualities which have made him Uruguay's first-choice left-back since the Copa America.

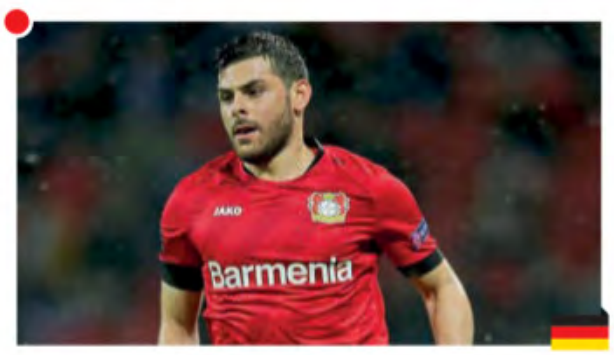
Carlos VINICIUS
Benfica & Brazil
He came, he saw, he conquered. Was not first choice when arriving at the Estadio da Luz last year, but a convincing first season sees the burly and opportunistic Brazilian striker among the top scorers in the Portuguese league.

VINICIUS JR.
Real Madrid & Brazil
Still not the finished article by any means, but Vinicius continued to impress with his directness in 2019-20. Endeared himself to Real fans with his first goal against Barcelona.

Edin VISCA
Istanbul Basaksehir & Bosnia-Herzegovina
The playmaker has been a talisman for Istanbul's over-achieving minnows in a nine-year stint at the club, but may leave this summer.

Dusan VLAHOVIC
Fiorentina & Serbia
Goals against both Inter and Napoli this season suggest that the big, skilful Vlahovic is a player with a great future, although Fiorentina may loan him out next season.

Nikola VLASIC
CSKA Moscow & Croatia
Might have found the hustle and bustle of the Premier League a little too hot to handle during a short-lived spell at Everton. But for CSKA, he is a creative machine.



Kevin VOLLAND
Bayer Leverkusen & Germany
Prior to going down with a nasty ankle ligament injury in February, the Germany international striker was in fine fettle, notably notching a brace in a 4-3 victory over Dortmund. Linked with no end of leading English clubs.

Aster VRANCKX
Mechelen & Belgium
Aged 17, the all-round central midfielder with physical pedigree has featured for Mechelen at senior level already. Likened to both Axel Witsel and Mousa Dembele.

Wout WEGHORST
Wolfsburg & Netherlands
Despite his technical limitations, the Dutch attacking spearhead compensates with his height, presence, work ethic and eye for goal. Has hit 33 Bundesliga goals in two seasons.

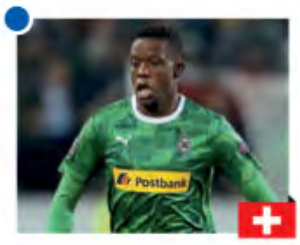
Timo WERNER
Chelsea & Germany
Lightning-quick and immensely adaptable sharpshooter, whose game came on leaps and bounds under RB coach Julian Nagelsmann. Cost Chelsea £54m.

Gini WIJNALDUM
Liverpool & Netherlands
His international goal record is far better than it is for Liverpool, but his role is no less important – the all-action midfielder is integral to Jurgen Klopp's *Gegenpress*.

Inaki WILLIAMS
Athletic Bilbao & Spain
The definition of ever-present, Williams finished the season by playing in his 157th consecutive La Liga match. It's the sixth-longest streak in the league's history.

Zhang YUNING
Beijing Guoan & China
The 23-year-old turned his back on West Brom and Vitesse to try his luck in the CSL. National team regular and rated as China's best young striker.

Wilfried ZAHA
Crystal Palace & Ivory Coast
Against all odds, he is still at Palace despite being regularly linked elsewhere. Contracted to 2023 with clubs reluctant to match the Eagles' asking price.



Denis ZAKARIA
Borussia M'Gladbach & Switzerland
Not for nothing are several clubs beating a path to the door of the 24-year-old. Comfortable on the ball, great vision and a gritty tackler.

Carlos VELA
Los Angeles FC & Mexico

Carlos Vela drew international attention as top scorer for Mexico when they won the 2005 U17 World Cup. Big European clubs were interested, but it was Arsenal who pounced. The move was also controversial, a clear contravention of FIFA's ban on international trading of players under the age of 18. Arsenal promptly sent Vela to Spain for a series of loan spells – Salamanca, Osasuna and eventually Real Sociedad, who went on to sign him permanently in 2012.

During Vela's five years in San Sebastian, he scored 73 goals in 250 games. What marked the left-footed Vela as special was that many of the goals were gems of football artistry – exquisitely-timed chips over the goalkeeper were a favourite. He was twice voted Sociedad's Player Of The Year.

There was some maverick behaviour. Vela once proclaimed that he didn't really like football, and his relations with various coaches of the Mexican national team were, at best, strained. For three years, between 2011 and 2014, Vela rejected all attempts to select him for the team.

His 2018 decision to join Los Angeles FC looked like another poor choice. His new coach would be former USA coach Bob Bradley – a strict disciplinarian.

But Los Angeles – and Bradley – turned out to be perfect for the then 30-year-old Vela. With Bradley allowing Vela to roam and improvise, his game flourished.

Fourteen goals came in 2018, but it was in 2019 that Vela dazzled. He blew the MLS season goalscoring record (31) out of the water by scoring 34, while his personal rivalry with Zlatan Ibrahimovic greatly spiced up LAFC's games with the cross-town Los Angeles Galaxy – "*El Trafico*," as the fixture is known. A tussle that was decided when LAFC knocked the Galaxy out of the 2019 play-offs with a wild 5-3 scoreline – Vela scored twice, Ibrahimovic only once.

While the Sweden striker has since moved back to Europe, Vela doesn't look like following. Rumours of interest from Barcelona in the 2019 January window didn't amount to anything, and it seems that he is happy in LA.

That, it seems, is his main motivation. He is not in love with the game, and performs best when unburdened by pressure or coaching instructions.

He has played his last game for Mexico, having retired from international duty following the 2018 World Cup, and recently told *GQ Magazine*: "I don't follow orders coaches give me, so I wouldn't feel comfortable giving orders to others as a manager. I don't see myself on television talking about soccer. If I could choose something to do with my life after I retire it would be something not related to soccer. I see myself gaining weight – I am very good at eating and travelling."

Paul Gardner

Nicolo ZANIOLO
Roma & Italy
Arguably the most talented of all the "new wave" of players in Mancini's Italy squad, Zaniolo is on the road back from a cruciate knee ligament injury sustained in January. Roma cannot wait – he could be their new talisman.

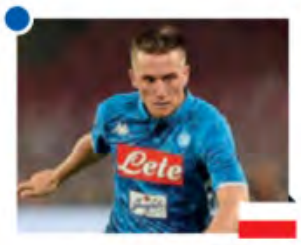
Matias ZARACHO
Racing Club & Argentina
Industrious and energetic attacking midfielder formed part of an exceptional group to come up through Racing Club's youth system with Lautaro Martinez, Juan Musso and Rodrigo de Paul. Zaracho is expected to join them in Europe soon.

Didier Lamkel ZE
Antwerp & Cameroon
Highly individualistic on and off the pitch, the atypical winger is the Belgian league's "bad boy". His contract runs until 2023, but his attitude makes him dispensable.

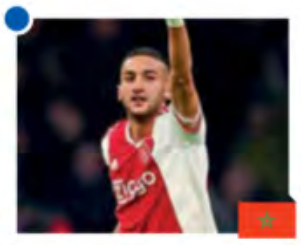
Zheng ZHI
Guangzhou Evergrande & China
Turns 40 this month, yet the former Celtic and Charlton man continues to outclass younger compatriots in a holding midfield role for Guangzhou.

Gao ZHUNYI
Guangzhou Evergrande & China
Aged 24, the ethnic Korean is now first choice for 2019 champions Guangzhou and expected to be a mainstay in the China side for years to come.

Huang ZICHANG
Jiangsu Suning & China
Pint-sized 23-year-old burst onto the scene in 2018, scoring five goals and named CSL Young Player Of The Year. Highly rated, in spite of a less successful second season.



Piotr ZIELINSKI
Napoli & Poland
One of the first to be confirmed in coach Gattuso's squad for next season, the versatile Poland international Zielinski is a quality player who can only get better.



Hakim ZIYECH
Chelsea & Morocco
Possibly the finest left foot in European football, he will be an exciting addition to Frank Lampard's new-look Chelsea in 2020-21 after arriving for £37.6m

Glenn Moore

Destination San Sebastian

Women's football makes a comeback with the Champions League

When the draw was made for the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-finals last November, Hedvig Lindahl and Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir were among those Wolfsburg players plotting the path to a third triumph. Now, as the competition resumes following a coronavirus-enforced suspension, they are blocking the German champions' way.

Lindahl had kept a clean sheet and Gunnarsdottir missed a penalty as Wolfsburg won 1-0 in the Netherlands to complete a 7-0 aggregate victory over Twente to reach the last eight. Now, though, the Sweden goalkeeper plays for Atletico Madrid, Wolfsburg's possible semi-final opponents, and Iceland's Gunnarsdottir is with defending champions, and likely finalists, Lyon. Should these match-ups come to pass, they could be forgiven for feeling a little strange.

Holders...Lyon beat Barcelona in last season's final

> As with the men, the remaining rounds of the Women's Champions League have been condensed, in their case to a ten-day stretch in Bilbao and San Sebastian

In ordinary circumstances this could not happen, transferred players would be cup-tied, but we live in extraordinary times. As with the men, the remaining rounds of the Women's Champions League have been condensed, in their case to a ten-day stretch in the Basque cities of Bilbao and San Sebastian, home of Real Sociedad, in late August.

Contracts in the women's game tend to be shorter than the men's, and movement greater, so there were added complications in pushing the competition two months beyond June 30, the usual contract expiration date. For example, during the hiatus both of the goalkeepers that Atletico began the competition with left the club: Sari van Veenendaal joined PSV, and Dolores Gallardo moved to Lyon. UEFA thus allowed clubs to include six new players, three of whom could have previously appeared for other quarter-finalists.

So Noelle Maritz, who also began the competition with Wolfsburg, could find herself facing them for Arsenal. Wolfsburg, meanwhile, could field Katarzyna Kiedrzynek, who started the competition with Paris Saint-Germain, or Pauline Bremer, scorer of Manchester City's late consolation as they were knocked out in the last round by Atletico.

One part of the world likely to take greater interest in the competition is Australia. Ahead of the last eight, Arsenal have signed Caitlin Foord, Steph Catley and Lydia Williams, while another Matilda, Ellie Carpenter, has gone to Lyon.

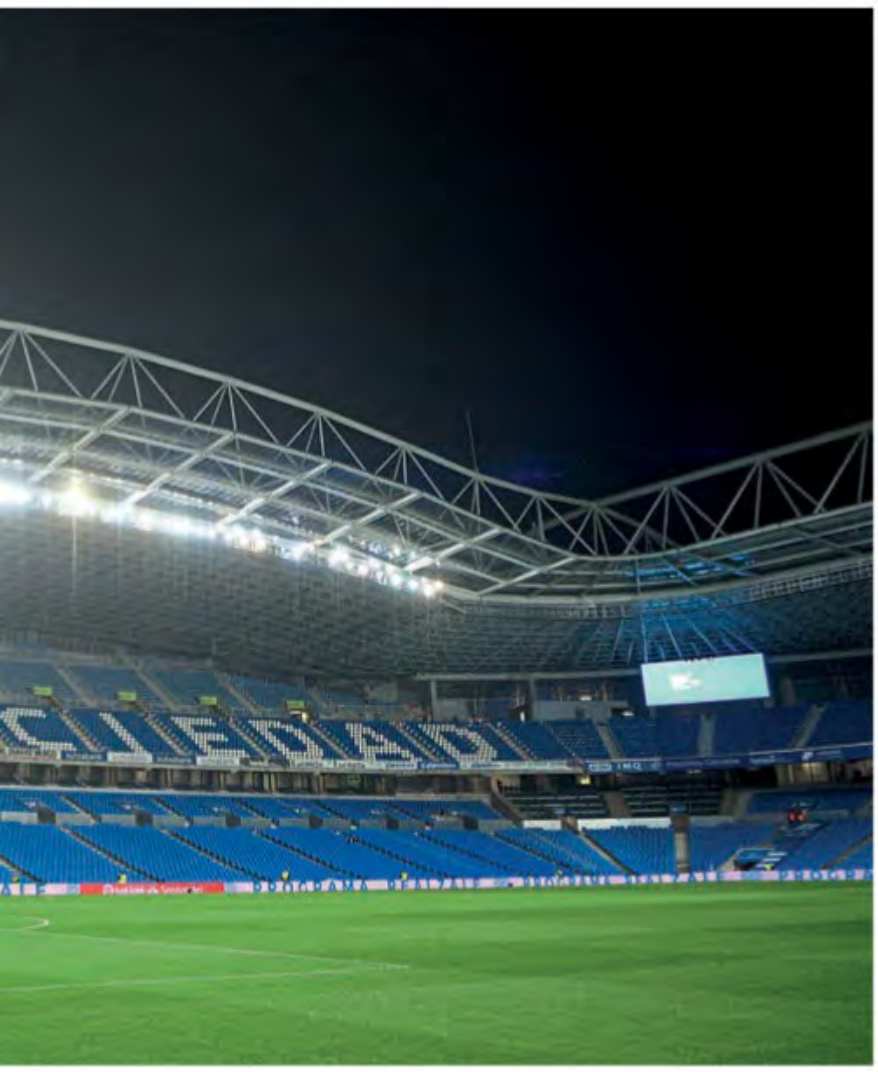
Besides Carpenter and Gunnarsdottir, the French champions have also brought in Sakina Karchaoui, from Montpellier. More importantly, the holders have also held on to star players Dzsenifer Marozsan and Sarah Bouhaddi, who had been bound for Utah Royals before coronavirus scuppered the move, and secured contract extensions for Manchester City-bound full-backs Lucy Bronze and Alex Greenwood. Although Ada Hegerberg and Griedge Mbock Bathy are unlikely to have recovered from injuries, Lyon look strong contenders for a fifth successive title.

However, they last played competitively in February and will inevitably be rusty. Bayern Munich, strengthened by the arrival of Lea Schuller (from Essen) and Viviane Asseyi (Bordeaux), but unfortunately not the injured Klara Buhl (Freiburg) get first crack at them. Then it will be the winner of the quarter-final between Lyon's domestic rivals, Paris Saint-Germain, and Arsenal. The latter will be wary of Ramona Bachmann, newly signed from Chelsea, for whom she scored twice against Arsenal at Wembley in the 2018 Women's FA Cup Final.

The other half of the draw is headed by Wolfsburg, seeking a fifth final in eight years. They have also added Lena Oberdorf, the teenage tyro, from Essen and should have far too much for Glasgow City. The Scots have made a statement signing in South African captain Janine van Wyk but are largely part-time and have only played one competitive match since November, a 2-1 defeat to Celtic in February in the opening game of the swiftly curtailed Scottish league campaign. Before millionaire philanthropist James Anderson stepped in, they were struggling to even afford to travel to Spain to compete. The last independent club in the competition, even reaching this stage is a fine achievement.

Vivianne Miedema... English hopes lie with Arsenal and this season's current CL top scorer

The first quarter-final to be staged is an all-Spanish affair, domestic champions



Host stadium...Real Sociedad's Anoeta

Barcelona against the team they usurped, Atletico Madrid. Bilbao's San Mames stadium will host the tie. The winners will meet Wolfsburg or Glasgow in Real Sociedad's Anoeta. San Sebastian will also host the final. It is unlikely fans will be allowed into matches.

The climax is expected to be Lyon v Wolfsburg for the third time in five years, but with the teams so short of match practice, and with such changes in personnel, surprises are likely. In football, as elsewhere, there are currently few certainties. The main aim is simply to complete the competition.

THE DRAW

QUARTER-FINALS
QF 1: Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
(Bilbao, Aug 21, 5pm)
QF 2: Glasgow City v Wolfsburg
(San Sebastian, Aug 21, 5pm)
QF 3: Lyon v Bayern Munich
(Bilbao, Aug 22, 7pm)
QF 4: Arsenal v Paris Saint-Germain
(San Sebastian, Aug 22, 7pm)

SEMI-FINALS
Winners QF 1 v QF 2
(San Sebastian, Aug 25, 7pm)
Winners QF 3 v QF 4
(Bilbao, Aug 26, 7pm)

FINAL
(San Sebastian, 30 Aug, 7pm)

Round-up

Merging...FFC Frankfurt lifting the 2014-15 Champions League

LAS BLANCAS ARRIVE, FRANKFURT MERGE

The move away from independent women's clubs continues. Real Madrid confirmed the €300,000 takeover of CD Tacon, who had played in their colours and at Real's Valdebebas training ground last season, while former Women's Champions League winners FFC Frankfurt became part of Eintracht Frankfurt.

Kosovare Asllani...the Sweden star will play for Real Madrid Femenino rather than CD Tacon from now on

LIFE MEANS LIFE

FIFA's lifetime ban on Keramuddin Karim was confirmed when the former president of the Afghanistan Football Federation lost his appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Karim was banned, and fined 1m Swiss francs, for his abuse of Afghani players. The court found he "violated basic human rights and damaged the mental and physical dignity and integrity of young female players. With his appalling acts, he had destroyed not only their careers, but severely damaged their lives."

MITTAG QUITS

German striker Anja Mittag, scorer of 50 international goals, has retired. She won the 2007 World Cup, 2016 Olympics, a trio of European Championships, the Champions League in 2005 and 2010 with Turbine Potsdam, and six league titles in Germany and Sweden.

Retiring... Mittag after her last game for Germany in 2017

FANS FORK OUT FOR COFFEE

The most popular initiative at the NWSL Challenge Cup, the tournament staged in place of a US league season, was a coffee truck. The players, held in a bio-bubble for a month, requested quality coffee as their "No.1 luxury". Fans raised $6,000 to cover provision of a truck and drinks. The Utah-based competition, held behind closed doors, featured several acknowledgements of the Black Lives Matter movement.
Full report next month.

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JUNE 26-JULY 17, 2020

Global diary

Stories from the four corners of the football world

Friday June 26

OCEANIA: Australia and New Zealand win the race to host the Women's World Cup in 2023.
PHILLIPINES: Former Chelsea academy graduate James Younghusband retires, following his brother Phil who ended his career last November. Both made over 100 appearances for the national team.

Saturday June 27

GERMANY: On the last day of the league season, Werder Bremen beat Cologne 6-1 to climb out of the Bundesliga relegation zone and above Fortuna Dusseldorf into the play-off place. Hoffenheim defeat Borussia Dortmund 4-0 with all four goals from Andrej Kramaric, and Timo Werner scores with his final touch as an RB Leipzig player.

Sunday June 28

AUSTRIA: Red Bull Salzburg beat TSV Hartberg 3-0 to clinch the league title and complete a domestic double, having won the cup in May.
ITALY: Arthur has a medical in Turin and will join Juventus from Barcelona when the Champions League ends, with Miralem Pjanic heading in the opposite direction.
TANZANIA: Simba SC are crowned champions of Tanzania – the first African country to restart its league after a three-month shutdown – despite being held to a 0-0 draw at home by mid-table Prisons FC.

Retiring...former Philippines striker James Younghusband

Monday June 29

ITALY: Benevento beat Juve Stabia 1-0 to secure promotion to Serie A with seven games to spare.

Tuesday June 30

CAMEROON: The Africa Cup of Nations, which was scheduled to take place in Cameroon from January 9 to February 6, 2021, is postponed until January 2022.
GERMANY: With debts of around €200m, Schalke face an uncertain future as billionaire backer and chairman Clemens Tonnies resigns after fan protests over his running of the club.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi's goal in Barcelona's 2-2 draw with Atletico Madrid is the 700th of his career, making him the seventh player in history to reach that milestone.
AFRICA: CAF confirms plans to launch a Women's Champions League tournament, due to start in 2021.
ASIA: The South Asian Football Federation Championship, due to begin in Bangladesh in September, is postponed for a year. Maldives won the last edition in 2018.

Double winners...Red Bull Salzburg

Wednesday July 1

BULGARIA: Lokomotiv Plovdiv retain the domestic cup, beating CSKA Sofia on penalties after a goalless draw, with winger Momchil Tsvetanov winning the competition for a record sixth time.
DENMARK: The cup final is suspended for 14 minutes as fans refuse to obey social distancing. When play resumes, SonderjyskE go on to beat AaB 2-0 – with Anders Jacobsen scoring both goals against his old club – to claim their first major trophy.
ENGLAND: Fundraising campaign begins to raise money for a statue for Jack Leslie, who was denied an England call-up in 1925 because he was black.
FRANCE: Lille owners unveil plans to add Boavista to their portfolio of clubs.
UZBEKISTAN: Uzbekistan join India, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in contesting to host the 2027 Asian Cup.
AFRICA: The FAs of both Ghana and Benin take the decision to cancel the 2019-20 season, having been on hold since March, with no champions declared.

Thursday July 2

ENGLAND: Manchester City give Liverpool a guard of honour ahead of the two sides' game at the Etihad Stadium, then go on to beat them 4-0, with former Red Raheem Sterling on the scoresheet.

Friday July 3

ENGLAND: Arsenal are fined £34,000 by FIFA for inserting illegal, secret sell-on clauses for player transfers, following an investigation into the deals of Chuba Akpom to Greek side PAOK and Joel Campbell to Italian side Frosinone in 2018.

Saturday July 4

SPAIN: La Liga announces that they will ban betting companies from sponsoring shirts in the league.
JAPAN: The J. League returns with a 0-0 draw between defending champions Yokohama Marinos and Urawa Red Diamonds.
ITALY: Juventus win the Turin derby 4-1 against Torino, while Lazio are beaten 3-0 at home to Milan, inching defending champions Juve closer towards yet another Serie A title.
ENGLAND: Mason Greenwood scores his first-ever Premier League brace as Manchester United win 5-2 at home to Bournemouth.
PORTUGAL: Arsenio Rodrigues Jardim, better known as "Seninho" and the player who scored twice for Porto to eliminate Manchester United from the 1977-78 European Cup-winners Cup, passes away at the age of 71.

Sunday July 5

QATAR: Xavi extends his contract at Al Sadd, with a reported clause that will allow him to join Barcelona if an offer comes in. ➤

Curacao

STEVE MENARY

On the rise

European players and coaches taking Curacao back to the top of CONCACAF

After winning the 2017 Caribbean Cup and reaching the quarter-finals of last year's Gold Cup, qualifying for a debut World Cup is the next target for Curacao. Reaching Qatar would be the culmination of a long project to revive football on the island, which is a self-governing part of the Netherlands.

Curacao were one of the strongest sides in the CONCACAF region until the 1960s, but fell behind as tours to Europe that had raised standards died out. The Dutch federation continued to train local coaches through the European system and Curacao began looking for players from the Diaspora.

Eligible players would often play for Dutch teams at youth level and dream of emulating the likes of Ajax graduate Gregory van der Wiel or Feyenoord midfielder Leroy Fer and going on to play for the *Oranje*. Curacao's representatives set about changing minds.

"In 2004, the national team began using professional players playing abroad in different competitions and in Holland," says Etienne Siliee, Curacao's coach from 1993-2004 and technical advisor from 2010-2016. "This pool of professional players became bigger and bigger every year and with more talented players."

The strength of the playing pool was boosted when a side of local players qualified for the 2013 CONCACAF Under-20 Championship. Experienced Dutch coach Hans Jan Schrijver was brought in for the finals in Mexico, where playing at high altitude for the first time was a disadvantage.

Schrijver boosted the squad with players from Europe and though Curacao lost 3-0 to Mexico and 2-1 to El Salvador, as both opponents qualified for the Under-20 World Cup finals, the results were no disgrace. After the tournament, Schrijver declared: "In four or five years, Curacao can be very good."

The prophecy came true at the 2017 Caribbean Cup. After his appointment as coach in 2015, former Netherlands star Patrick Kluivert persuaded European players such as goalkeeper Eloy Room, then at PSV, and Leandro Bacuna, a Dutch U21 international, to sign up.

Kluivert left in 2016, leaving his assistant Remko Bicentini to take charge of the team for the tournament. Built on a solid defence, Curacao edged out hosts Martinique in the semi-finals, then beat holders Jamaica in the final. Bicentini says: "The main reasons for our success is the crop of players that we now can select. Our selection is also a close-knit team, all for each other."

Curacao's last matches were in the Nations League, where second-place in their group behind Costa Rica meant qualification for a third successive Gold Cup. The next step will be the World Cup qualifiers, which are being reorganised by CONCACAF. "It is certainly a real goal for us," says Bicentini.

The team has used the FIFA window to travel and gain experience, playing in Qatar in 2017 and Thailand, where they won the 2019 King's Cup. The team can also be helped by coaches back in Europe says Siliee, who adds: "[We need] the co-operation of the Dutch coaches to not select the crack players of Curacao for only one game and later on they cannot participate in the Curacao team."

The team's performance on the pitch should also persuade players from the European Diaspora that the Caribbean now offers a real route to success.

Star man...Cardiff City midfielder Leandro Bacuna in action at the 2017 Gold Cup

> "We need Dutch coaches to not select the crack players of Curacao for only one game and later on they cannot participate in the Curacao team"
>
> Etienne Siliee, former Curacao coach and technical adviser

Success...Curacao celebrating their 2017 Caribbean Cup victory

Cameroon

MARK GLEESON

AFCON postponed

2021 tournament pushed back to January 2022

2017 champions... Cameroon were due to host the competition in January 2021

The decision to postpone the Africa Cup of Nations finals seemed the only logical outcome as the horrible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was slowly gathering momentum across Africa – just at the time when the death toll elsewhere was dropping and the rest of the world was beginning to open up again.

FIFA also had left little room for manoeuvre when they cancelled September's window for international football in all confederations, save for Europe.

It meant little time to complete the four rounds of qualifiers that would determine the field for the 24-team tournament in Cameroon, which was slated to start on January 9.

There is now opportunity for two more rounds of qualifiers to be completed in the October window – if African borders are opened up again and travel links restored.

Still scheduled for November is the start of the group phase of the African qualifiers for the next World Cup. It is not for the first time the qualifying competitions of the two tournaments overlap in what has always been a confusing tangle of fixtures and permutations for the punters to follow.

Presidents...CAF leader Ahmad Ahmad (left) and FIFA boss Gianni Infantino (right)

Earlier this year, Gianni Infantino suggested that the Cup of Nations be hosted every four years: "I was always told it was played every two years because it generates building of infrastructure and it generates revenues," he said.

Cameroon's Cup of Nations seemed cursed, but all was seemingly sorted and finally on track before the pandemic struck

"When you look at it, over the last 20 years, I have not seen this alleged proliferation of top-class infrastructure being built as a result of the African Cup being played every two years. In terms of revenues, we are miles away from any decent competition. There might be a reason why other continents only play their main competition every four years. It makes it more exclusive, you can prepare a better product, and you can present your qualifying matches in a better way."

Infantino's stranglehold on African administrators, however, looks to be waning, and his ideas on improving African football have been given short shrift.

Indeed, Confederation of African Football president Ahmad Ahmad says the 2022 Cup of Nations will be followed one year later by the 2023 edition in the Ivory Coast, as CAF ensure the tournament returns to kilter. That would seem ludicrous, especially if CAF stick with hosting the tournament in January, as it would follow just weeks after the Qatar World Cup, which is scheduled from November 21 to December 18.

Ahmad said this was still to be decided but CAF had agreed 2023 would go ahead, even with the postponement of the 2021 edition. "We have past precedence of holding Cup of Nations finals one year after the other, so I don't see any reason why not."

When CAF decided to change the hosting of the Cup of Nations from every even year to every odd year, it hosted both a 2012 edition (in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon) and 2013 (originally awarded to Libya but replaced by South Africa) edition. It has since kept with playing the tournament every odd year.

But how CAF would also fit in qualifiers for a 2023 edition is difficult to see. It has, most likely, not been properly figured out yet.

Cameroon have not had much luck with the hosting of what was originally meant to be the swansong of Issa Hayatou, the all-powerful CAF president from 1988 to 2017.

They were awarded the 2019 tournament in September 2014, ahead of Algeria and the Ivory Coast, more as a gift to Hayatou than on any logistical merits. But then came Hayatou's surprise ousting in the 2017 elections, with Ahmad upsetting the formbook and almost immediately criticising Cameroon's preparations.

A few months later it was made even more difficult for them when CAF expanded the field of the finalists from 16 to 24. Cameroon's government insisted that it was up to the challenge, but within a year delays in stadium and hotel construction saw CAF take it away from Cameroonians and ask Egypt, at short notice, to host instead.

The consolation was a shift in the hosting order – Cameroon got 2021, the Ivorians 2023 and Guinea were moved out to 2025.

Then FIFA announced a Club World Cup for mid-2021 and CAF were left having to find an excuse to change the Cup of Nations dates again. It was shifted back six months to January 2021, allegedly because of the "rainy season" but patently not to clash with Infantino's pet project.

This ensured that the African championship is again at odds with European clubs who are forced to give up their African players at a key juncture of the season.

Cameroon's Cup of Nations seemed cursed, but all was seemingly sorted and finally on track before the pandemic struck. Cameroon were due to test their facilities by hosting April's African Nations Championship, which is the 16-team tournament for quasi-national teams made up of locally-based players only. But that had to be postponed and will now take place in January on the dates originally reserved for the Cup of Nations.

➤ **SPAIN:** Sergio Ramos scores his 22nd consecutive penalty for Real Madrid in a 1-0 victory over Athletic Bilbao.

Monday July 6

GERMANY: Werder Bremen avoid relegation from the Bundesliga by overcoming second-tier Heidenheim in the relegation play-off, drawing the second leg 2-2 to claim an aggregate victory on away goals.
ITALY: Former Juventus defender Giuseppe Rizza dies from a brain aneurysem at the age of 33.
QATAR: Al Duhail announce that they have parted ways with Croatia forward Mario Mandzukic, who leaves the club after just ten matches.

Tuesday July 7

ITALY: Milan produce an incredible fightback against Juventus, recovering form 2-0 down to win 4-2 at the San Siro. It proves not to be a costly error however, as Lazio suffer a 2-1 defeat at Lecce.
COLOMBIA: The Colombian Federation and FIFA Council members are fined for irregular ticket sales to World Cup qualifiers, with tickets for home games against Brazil and Uruguay sold for more than three times their face value.
EUROPE: A report by the European Club Association claims that European clubs stand to lose up to €4 billion over the next year as a result of the coronavirus.

Wednesday July 8

SPAIN: Police intervene after four red cards are shown in injury time during the La Liga clash between Getafe and Villarreal. Meanwhile, Luis Suarez moves up to third on Barcelona's all-time top scorers' list with his 195th goal, scoring against Espanyol to send Barca's local rivals into the second division.

Thursday July 9

ALGERIA: 1994 and 1998 World Cup referee Mohamed Kouradji dies from COVID-19.
SENEGAL: The country's Football Federation succumbs to the coronavirus, with the 2019-20 season brought to a halt. There are no champions or relegation, but top two Teungueth FC and Jaraaf FC will be their CAF Champions League representatives.
USA: The first game of the MLS Is Back Tournament gets under ➤

➤ way, with Orlando City coming from behind to beat Inter Miami, while Philadelphia secure a 1-0 win over New York City on the first day of soccer's return to the US.

Friday July 10

SOUTH AMERICA: FIFA agrees to move September's World Cup qualifiers to October. CONMEBOL have also requested a new international window for January.
ENGLAND: Bruno Fernandes is named Premier League Player Of The Month for the second time since joining Man. United
IRAQ: Al Talaba goalkeeper Karrar Ibrahim Hashim is found dead in his car in Baghdad.

Saturday July 11

ENGLAND: Norwich City's relegation to the Championship is confirmed by a 4-0 defeat to West Ham, with Michail Antonio scoring all four goals, while Liverpool's hopes of completing a 100% home record are ended by a 1-1 draw with Burnley. Sheffield United striker David McGoldrick is targeted with racist abuse after scoring twice in the Blades' 3-0 win against Chelsea.
AZERBAIJAIN: Veteran Italian coach Gianni De Biasi takes charge of the Azerbaijan national team.

Sunday July 12

ENGLAND: West Midlands Police arrest a 12-year-old boy for sending racist messages to Wilfried Zaha. On the pitch, Tottenham come from 1-0 down to win the North London derby 2-1, with goals by Toby Alderweireld and Son Heung-min, and Dominic Solanke ends his 38-match drought by scoring twice in Bournemouth's shock 4-1 win over Leicester.
USA: MLS Is Back tournament fixture between Toronto and DC United is postponed for a second time, after a positive COVID test for DC and an inconclusive one for Toronto.
FRANCE: Crowds return to stadiums as PSG beat Le Havre in front of 5,000 fans.
AUSTRALIA: Former Socceroos and Crystal Palace captain Mile Jedinak announces his retirement.

Monday July 13

ENGLAND: Wycombe Wanderers, beneficiaries of the EFL's points-per-game settling of ➤

Australia

SIMON HILL

On the edge

The battle is on to bring Australian football back from the brink

While COVID-19 posed significant challenges for many clubs around the world, for Australia's A-League it presented a very real threat to its continued existence.

After initially attempting to keep the competition running with matches held behind closed doors, the league finally bowed to the inevitable when state borders were shut in late March.

Coming on the back of a three-year governance war between the national body and the clubs, and declining crowds and TV ratings, the competition's broadcaster and main financial benefactor, Fox Sports, signalled its intent to tear up its contract, using "Force Majeure" as the conduit.

In fairness, the pay-TV network – which has financial problems of its own due to the fast-changing media landscape – engaged similar tactics to drive down the value of rights deals in other sports, too. But for the A-League, operating on a far less lucrative deal, this translated into a sobering existential crisis.

As other leagues and sports announced their return dates after the hiatus, the A-League waited nervously on the sidelines, before feeling compelled to apply a little pressure by going public with a proposed July 16 resumption date.

This set in train some tense negotiations between the broadcaster and new Football Federation Australia (FFA) CEO James Johnson, a former player with Brisbane Strikers who is freshly returned to his native land after a stint as FIFA's Head of Professional Football.

Johnson was dealt a poor hand. A fractured football community and a frustrated host broadcaster was a potentially lethal cocktail for a game already feeding off scraps in a part of the world where Aussie Rules and Rugby League swallow up most of the attention – and, subsequently, most of the money.

There were moments during the talks when Fox seemed set to walk, and with little interest elsewhere there was even speculation the game would set up its own broadcasting facility or that the league would go into semi-permanent hibernation.

In the end, the old deal – which still had three years to run – was ripped up, and a new one-year extension put in place. Although worth less financially, this provided some security, some breathing space and a chance for Johnson to put some plans in place.

James Johnson is well aware that this deal is merely a stay of execution unless the sport can begin to deliver on its undoubtedly huge potential

A-League... Newcastle Jets take on Melbourne City

That was probably the best available outcome, even though some club owners signalled their displeasure. Johnson has proved a skilful operator, earning the trust of at least most of a traditionally fragmented community. But now comes the tricky bit.

Johnson is well aware that this deal is merely a stay of execution unless the sport can begin to deliver on its undoubtedly huge potential. The key is tapping into a grass-roots base of two million players – which is by far the biggest of any sport in the country – and converting them into fans of the nation's senior clubs.

Johnson is already being creative in trying to find solutions. He has switched the 2020-21 season from October-May to December-July. Although this means going head-to-head with the dominant codes for longer, by extending further into winter it will mean cooler conditions for players and fans alike in a country where 40-degree Celsius temperatures are not uncommon in the summer months.

It also aligns the A-League with the second-tier National Premier Leagues, the state-based

competitions that have long argued they are too disconnected from the professional game. Johnson is considering adding a national second division, ultimately with promotion and relegation, to end the "closed shop" top flight, and bring the different strands even closer together.

He also kept the popular FFA Cup out of the revised broadcast deal, with the competition expected to be the testing ground for a new in-house service that may well replace Fox if no broadcaster can be found when the current deal ends in July 2021.

The players too are adjusting to the new reality. They have had to take a pretty severe cut in terms of wages due to the revised terms of the deal and, when the league resumed in July, some of the competition's overseas stars – such as Sweden's Ola Toivonen – did not return.

FFA CEO...James Johnson

The current season will conclude with a flurry of 32 games in 36 days, mainly to be played at regional "hubs" behind closed doors.

Sydney FC will almost certainly be crowned Premiers as they were eight points clear at the top before lockdown with six games to play, while nearest rivals, Melbourne City, have only three matches remaining. Whether Sydney can maintain that form come the lottery of finals football remains to be seen.

By then, spectators may have returned to stadiums in Australia, which had posted impressive numbers in its reaction to COVID-19, and was a factor which also led the nation, along with New Zealand, to be named co-hosts of the Women's World Cup in 2023.

By then, the national-league landscape could look very different. It all depends upon Johnson's ability to unite the warring factions that have so often stymied football's progress in Australia.

Vietnam

JOHN DUERDEN

Business as usual

Fans return to Vietnamese stadiums

On June 5, Vietnam's V-League kicked off for the second time this year. The Southeast Asian country followed Germany and South Korea in bringing the game back quickly after the coronavirus outbreak, but there was a difference. Inside the stadium, rather than supporters on video screens and cardboard cut-outs – or "adult" dolls as installed mistakenly by FC Seoul in their first home game of the season – there were actual real-life fans. There were no fake crowd noises or shouts but genuine sounds, and that non-stop Vietnamese atmosphere of singing and dancing. It was just like it always was.

Well, almost.

While the wearing of masks was not mandatory, fans had temperatures taken upon entry and there was plenty of hand sanitiser to go around. And stadiums were reduced to half capacity to provide some sort of social distancing – although that didn't always work.

When Hong Linh Ha Tinh hosted Hanoi FC, rather than 10,000 at the 20,000-capacity arena in Ha Tinh there were around 22,000. The stadium in the northern part of the country was so overcrowded that the game was delayed for 22 minutes as fans spilled out from the packed terraces onto the pitch.

Apart from the discomfort, there were few other health worries. While New Zealand earned plenty of international plaudits for declaring itself free of the coronavirus on June 8, no country has handled the virus as well as Vietnam. Despite a long land border with China and a population of close to 100 million, Vietnam has had zero deaths thanks to strict measures that were taken early.

"Vietnam has faced the challenge of the coronavirus very well," said Ho Chi Minh City FC coach Jung Hae-sung, a native of South Korea, another country that had controlled the virus. "It shows the potential of this country and it shows the potential of football here."

That is certainly true. Vietnam loves football and loves the national team. The Golden Stars have slowly become the No.1 in Southeast Asia. Popular coach Park Hang-seo, another South Korean, has built a team around a generation of talented young

Photos Credit: VN Express

➤ League One, are promoted to the Championship for the first time in their history.

AUSTRALIA: Australian clubs Melbourne City, Melbourne Victory and Western United are granted exemption from travel bans in order to complete the league season in New South Wales.

FRANCE: Christopher Aurier, brother of Tottenham defender Serge, is shot and killed outside a nightclub in Toulouse.

Tuesday July 14

NIGERIA: The 2019-20 season is brought to an end, with no promotion or relegation between the top two tiers.

ZAMBIA: Bucking the trend in Africa, the Zambian league announces its return, with fixtures getting underway on the weekend of July 18-19.

ENGLAND: Wigan Athletic thrash Hull City 8-0 in the Championship,

Under construction...2022 World Cup final host, the Lusail Stadium

Comeback...Hong Linh Ha Tinh v Hanoi FC

players that reached the final of the 2018 Asian U23 Championship. They were cheered on by millions of red-shirted fans who took to the streets of the capital Hanoi in the north and Ho Chi Minh City – still known as Saigon by the locals – way down in the south.

The fans were out again at the end of the year as the senior side, featuring many of those same youngsters, won Southeast Asia's biennial AFF Cup. A few weeks later the Golden Stars made the last eight of the 2019 Asian Cup before being knocked out by Japan.

Good performances in qualification for the 2022 World Cup have the team on course for a first appearance in the final stage where 12 teams battle it out for four spots. Even if they don't make Qatar, there is a real hope that with expansion in 2026, Vietnam will be on the world stage before long.

There are talented players such as Nguyen Quang Hai, a 23-year-old attacking midfielder regarded as the best in Southeast Asia and one of the best on the continent, and Doan Van Hau, recently on loan at Dutch side Heerenveen, and the only player so far to play in Europe. With many more coming through some of the country's excellent academies, it is no surprise that the national team is going from strength to strength.

> **There are talented players – Nguyen Quang Hai, a 23-year-old attacking midfielder regarded as the best in Southeast Asia, and Doan Van Hau, the only player so far to play in Europe**

Yet while Vietnam may have overtaken regional rivals at national level, the same can't be said of the V-League. Thailand still rules the regional roost in that regard and Malaysia is also a force. There has not yet been a Vietnamese club that has become a side to compare with Buriram United of Thailand or Malaysia's Johor Darul Tazim.

Past corruption and incompetence as well as political interference has held the league back. Attendances, despite the recent overcrowding, have also been fairly low at around 7,000. There has been a drive to modernise the way the clubs are run, and to become more business and community-minded. If that continues, then the league should be able to make the steps that it needs to make.

Overall, though, the future is looking bright. There is real talent in Vietnam and the national team is on the up. And, most importantly for the moment, there are fans in stadiums. How lots of other leagues would love to say the same.

Full house...Ha Tinh were fined for having too many fans in the stadium

scoring seven times in the first half, to record the joint-biggest win in the league's history.

MALAWI: Legendary former midfielder Kannock Munde dies from COVID-19.

Wednesday July 15

FIFA: The complete schedule for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar is released. It's confirmed that four group stage games will be played across 11 hours every day. The final will be held on December 18, in front of 80,000 fans at the Lusail Stadium.

PORTUGAL: Moussa Marega scores in injury time as Porto seal a 29th Primeira Liga title with a 2-0 win over fierce rivals Sporting.

IFAB: Football's lawmakers agree to extend the option of allowing five substitutions per team into the summer of 2021.

ENGLAND: Arsenal beat Liverpool 2-1 at the Emirates, ending Liverpool's hopes of setting a new Premier League points record. Harry Kane scores his 200th goal in club football at Newcastle.

Thursday July 16

SPAIN: Real Madrid win La Liga for the first time in three years by beating Villarreal at an empty Alfredo Di Stefano stadium, as 10-man Osasuna win 2-1 at the Nou Camp – the first side to beat Barcelona there in the league since 2018.

SIERRA LEONE: The country's National Premier League becomes the latest African nation to cancel the 2019-20 season.

Friday July 17

SPAIN: Mallorca are relegated after only one season back in La Liga, suffering a 2-1 defeat at home to Granada, with two players sent off during the game.

Club football

All concluded league tables.
Champions (C), relegated (R) and if null and void, no (C) and (R) included.

EUROPE

AUSTRIA
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RB Salzburg (C)	32	22	8	2	110	34	50
Rapid Vienna	32	17	7	8	64	43	38
Wolfsberger AC	32	15	9	8	69	43	35
LASK	32	20	4	8	67	37	33
Hartberg	32	12	6	14	52	74	27
Sturm Graz	32	10	5	17	46	60	19

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria Vienna	32	12	11	9	49	47	34
Rheindorf Altach	32	10	8	14	45	53	26
St. Polten	32	8	10	14	39	65	25
Mattersburg	32	8	6	18	39	64	21
Admira	32	6	10	16	29	57	18
Swarovski Tirol (R)	32	6	8	18	34	66	16

BULGARIA
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ludogorets (C)	31	21	9	1	59	18	72
CSKA Sofia	31	16	11	4	52	22	59
Slavia Sofia	31	16	7	8	42	32	55
Levski Sofia	31	15	8	8	50	30	53
Lokomotiv Plovdiv	31	15	8	8	53	35	53
Beroe	31	16	1	14	50	43	49

Relegation Round Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cherno More	29	12	11	6	39	27	47
Etar	29	7	10	12	34	48	31
Tsarsko Selo	29	9	4	16	27	46	31
Vitosha Bistritsa (R)	29	1	3	25	15	57	6

Relegation Round Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botev Plovdiv	29	10	6	13	32	34	36
Arda	29	8	11	10	28	35	35
Botev Vratsa	29	6	8	15	26	50	26
Dunav Ruse	29	5	7	17	25	55	22

Relegation Final Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botev Vratsa	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Dunav Ruse* (R)	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Tsarsko Selo**	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Dunav Ruse lost to Second League's Montana 4-1 in the relegation play-offs
***Tsarsko Selo beat Second League's Septemvri Sofia 2-0 in the relegation play-offs*

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich (C)	34	26	4	4	100	32	82
Borussia Dortmund	34	21	6	7	84	41	69
RB Leipzig	34	18	12	4	81	37	66
Borussia M'gladbach	34	20	5	9	66	40	65
Bayer Leverkusen	34	19	6	9	61	44	63
Hoffenheim	34	15	7	12	53	53	52
Wolfsburg	34	13	10	11	48	46	49
Freiburg	34	13	9	12	48	47	48
Eintracht Frankfurt	34	13	6	15	59	60	45
Hertha Berlin	34	11	8	15	48	59	41
Union Berlin	34	12	5	17	41	58	41
Schalke	34	9	12	13	38	58	39
Mainz	34	11	4	19	44	65	37
Cologne	34	10	6	18	51	69	36
Augsburg	34	9	9	16	45	63	36
Werder Bremen*	34	8	7	19	42	69	31
Fortuna Dusseldorf (R)	34	6	12	16	36	67	30
Paderborn (R)	34	4	8	22	37	74	20

Werder Bremen beat 2. Bundesliga's Heidenheim (agg 2-2) on away goals in the relegation play-off

GREECE
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	36	28	7	1	74	16	91
PAOK	36	21	10	5	58	29	73
AEK Athens	36	20	9	7	59	32	69
Panathinaikos	36	15	13	8	43	32	58
Aris	36	10	12	14	48	51	42
OFI	36	10	6	20	43	56	36

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Asteras Tripolis	33	11	10	12	44	42	43
Atromitos	33	11	9	13	41	43	42
Larissa	33	8	12	13	32	42	36
Lamia	33	6	17	10	23	36	35
Volos NFC	33	8	7	18	27	54	31
Panetolikos	33	6	11	16	30	48	29
Xanthi*	33	9	9	15	25	38	24
Panionios** (R)	33	7	8	18	20	48	23

Xanthi were deducted 12 points and enter the relegation play-offs
***Panionios were deducted 6 points*

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ferencvaros (C)	33	23	7	3	58	24	76
Fehervar	33	18	9	6	56	29	63
Puskas Akademia	33	14	12	7	52	41	54
Mezokovesd	33	14	8	11	42	31	50
Budapest Honved	33	12	8	13	36	44	44
Ujpest	33	12	7	14	45	45	43
Zalaegerszeg	33	11	10	12	51	44	43
Kisvarda	33	12	6	15	42	43	42
Diosgyor	33	12	5	16	40	52	41
Paksi	33	11	8	14	46	53	41
Debrecen (R)	33	11	6	16	48	57	39
Kaposvar (R)	33	4	2	27	27	80	14

ISRAEL
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Tel Aviv (C)	36	26	9	1	63	10	87
Maccabi Haifa	36	22	7	7	73	32	73
Beitar Jerusalem	36	16	11	9	51	35	59
Hapoel Be'er Sheva	36	15	10	11	44	33	55
Hapoel Tel Aviv	36	14	6	16	31	55	48
Hapoel Haifa	36	12	11	13	39	46	47

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bnei Yehuda	33	13	10	10	40	30	49
Ashdod	33	10	11	12	48	47	41
Hapoel Hadera	33	10	10	13	33	42	40
Maccabi Netanya	33	11	7	15	35	46	40
Hapoel Kfar Saba	33	10	8	15	28	38	38
Ironi Kiryat Shmona	33	9	5	19	30	43	32
Sektzia Nes Tziona (R)	33	8	8	17	23	46	32
Hapoel Ra'anana (R)	33	2	11	20	27	62	17

POLAND
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia Warsaw (C)	36	21	6	9	69	33	69
Lech Poznan	36	17	12	7	66	35	63
Piast Gliwice	36	18	6	12	40	31	60
Slask Wroclaw	36	14	12	10	50	44	54
Lechia Gdansk	36	14	11	11	46	49	53
Cracovia	36	16	4	16	48	39	52
Jagiellonia Bialystok	36	14	10	12	48	47	52
Pogon Szczecin	36	13	12	11	35	38	51

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gornik Zabrze	36	14	11	11	51	45	53
Wisla Plock	36	14	9	13	44	52	51
Zaglebie Lubin	36	14	8	14	59	53	50
Rakow Czestochowa	36	15	5	16	49	55	50
Wisla Krakow	36	13	6	17	44	55	45
Arka Gdynia (R)	36	9	10	17	38	57	37
Korona Kielce (R)	36	8	8	20	27	48	32
LKS Lodz (R)	36	6	6	24	33	66	24

SLOVAKIA
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan Bratislava (C)	27	21	5	1	57	14	68
Zilina	27	15	6	6	48	25	51
DAC	27	15	5	7	42	28	50
Spartak Trnava	27	10	5	12	30	32	35
Ruzomberok	27	7	11	9	28	33	32
Zemplin Michalovce	27	8	8	11	31	49	32

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Trencin	27	11	6	10	52	43	39
Zlate Moravce	27	8	9	10	27	33	33
Sered'	27	6	9	12	29	41	27
Senica	27	6	8	13	26	40	26
Pohronie	27	6	8	13	25	44	26
Nitra*	27	7	4	16	23	36	25

Nitra beat II. Liga's FK Dubnica 3-0 on aggregate in the relegation play-offs

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid (C)	38	26	9	3	70	25	87
Barcelona	38	25	7	6	86	38	82
Atletico Madrid	38	18	16	4	51	27	70
Sevilla	38	19	13	6	54	34	70
Villarreal	38	18	6	14	63	49	60
Real Sociedad	38	16	8	14	56	48	56
Granada	38	16	8	14	52	45	56
Getafe	38	14	12	12	43	37	54
Valencia	38	14	11	13	46	53	53
Osasuna	38	13	13	12	46	54	52
Athletic Bilbao	38	13	12	13	41	38	51
Levante	38	14	7	17	47	53	49
Real Valladolid	38	9	15	14	32	43	42
Eibar	38	11	9	18	39	56	42
Real Betis	38	10	11	17	48	60	41
Alaves	38	10	9	19	34	59	39
Celta Vigo	38	7	16	15	37	49	37
Leganes (R)	38	8	12	18	30	51	36
Mallorca (R)	38	9	6	23	40	65	33
Espanyol (R)	38	5	10	23	27	58	25

UKRAINE
Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar Donetsk (C)	32	26	4	2	80	26	82
Dynamo Kiev	32	18	5	9	65	35	59
Zorya	32	17	7	8	50	29	58
Desna	32	17	5	10	59	33	56
Oleksandria	32	14	7	11	49	47	49
Kolos Kovalivka	32	10	2	20	33	59	32

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dnipro-1	30	13	4	13	42	42	43
Mariupol	30	10	9	11	34	46	39
Olimpik Donetsk	30	8	6	16	32	47	30
Vorskla Poltava	30	7	7	16	23	48	28
Lviv	32	5	9	18	25	57	24
Karpaty*	24	2	9	13	19	42	15

Karpaty expelled for failing to appear in two calendar games

AFRICA

GHANA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Berekum Chelsea	15	9	2	4	17	12	29
Aduana Stars	15	8	4	3	17	11	28
Asante Kotoko	14	7	4	3	14	7	25
Elmina Sharks	15	6	7	2	18	13	25
Ashanti Gold	15	7	4	4	12	10	25
Medeama	15	8	3	4	18	11	24
Bechem United	15	6	4	5	15	14	22
Hearts of Oak	14	5	6	3	14	11	21
Great Olympics	15	6	2	7	17	19	20
WAFA	15	4	7	4	15	12	19
Inter Allies	14	5	4	5	22	21	19
Eleven Wonders	15	5	4	6	11	15	19
Dreams	15	4	4	7	10	11	16
Liberty Professionals	15	4	4	7	21	23	16
Legon Cities	15	3	7	5	12	18	16
Ebusua Dwarfs	15	4	3	8	13	20	15
Karela	15	2	5	8	10	16	11
King Faisal	14	0	6	8	17	29	6

NIGERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plateau United	25	14	7	4	36	15	49
Rivers United	25	13	6	6	28	15	45
Lobi Stars	25	12	7	6	26	19	43
Enugu Rangers	24	10	7	7	25	20	37
Enyimba	20	11	3	6	30	20	36
Akwa United	25	8	11	6	23	22	35
Kano Pillars	24	8	10	6	27	18	34
Dakkada	26	8	10	8	26	26	34
Sunshine Stars	25	9	7	9	27	29	34
Katsina United	24	9	7	8	18	25	34
Warri Wolves	24	9	6	9	25	23	33
Ifeanyi Uba	25	10	3	12	25	28	33
Heartland	25	9	5	11	21	21	32
MFM	25	8	7	10	19	19	31
Wikki Tourist	25	8	7	10	23	24	31
Abia Warriors	25	8	6	11	23	28	30
Nasarawa United	25	8	5	12	27	27	29
Jigawa Golden Stars	25	9	2	14	25	35	29
Kwara United	25	8	4	13	23	33	28
Adamawa United	25	6	2	17	17	47	20

SENEGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Teungueth	13	10	3	0	22	6	33
Jaraaf	13	6	3	4	12	9	21
Douanes	13	6	3	4	11	8	21
DSC	13	5	4	4	15	11	19
Casa Sport	13	5	4	4	10	10	19
Pikine	13	3	7	3	11	13	16
Stade de Mbour	13	4	4	5	11	14	16
Mbour Petite Cote	13	3	6	4	12	15	15
Goree	13	4	3	6	10	16	15
Diambars	13	3	5	5	18	17	14
ASEC Ndiambour	13	3	5	5	13	15	14
Generation Foot	13	3	4	6	11	13	13
Niarry Tally	13	2	7	4	8	12	13
CNEPS Excellence	13	2	6	5	5	10	12

SIERRA LEONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bo Rangers	13	6	5	2	13	7	23
Kamboi Eagles	12	6	3	3	14	9	21
Diamond Stars	13	5	5	3	17	12	20
Kallon	12	5	5	2	12	7	20
East End Lions	10	6	2	2	9	4	20
Old Edwardians	12	6	2	4	12	9	20
East End Tigers	12	6	2	4	12	9	20
Ports Authority	12	5	3	4	15	11	18
Johansen	12	3	5	4	7	9	14
Anti Drugs Strikers	12	3	4	5	6	10	13
RSLAF	12	3	4	5	7	12	13
Central Parade	12	1	5	6	9	17	8
Mighty Blackpool	12	1	5	6	9	18	8
Freetown City	12	1	4	7	2	10	7

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals

Sep 5: Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v Al Ahly (Egy)
Sep 6: Raja Casablanca (Mor) v Zamalek (Egy)

CAF CONFEDERATION CUP

Semi-finals

Sep TBC: Pyramids (Egy) v Horoya (Gui)
Sep TBC: RS Berkane (Mor) v Hassania Agadir (Mor)

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Latest tables. West region (Groups A-D) rescheduled to take place in September. East region (Groups E-H) rescheduled to take place in October/November.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahli	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Al Wahda	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Esteghlal	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Al Shorta	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Sep 14: Al Ahli (Sau) v Al Shorta (Irq); Al Wahda (UAE) v Esteghlal (Irn)
Sep 17: Al Shorta v Al Ahli; Esteghlal v Al Wahda
Sep 20: Al Ahli v Al Wahda; Esteghlal v Al Shorta
Sep 23: Al Wahda v Al Shorta; Esteghlal v Al Ahli

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pakhtakor	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Al Hilal	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Shabab Al Ahli	2	0	0	2	2	4	0
Shahr Khodro	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Sep 14: Shabab Al Ahli (UAE) v Shahr Khodro (Irn); Al Hilal (Sau) v Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Sep 17: Shahr Khodro v Shabab Al Ahli; Pakhtakor v Al Hilal
Sep 20: Shahr Khodro v Al Hilal; Shabab Al Ahli v Pakhtakor
Sep 23: Al Hilal v Shabab Al Ahli; Shahr Khodro v Pakhtakor

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Taawoun	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Al Duhail	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Persepolis	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Sharjah	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Sep 15: Persepolis (Irn) v Al Taawoun (Sau); Al Duhail (Qat) v Sharjah (UAE)
Sep 18: Al Taawoun v Persepolis; Sharjah v Al Duhail
Sep 21: Persepolis v Al Duhail; Al Taawoun v Sharjah
Sep 24: Al Duhail v Al Taawoun; Persepolis v Sharjah

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Sadd	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Al Nassr	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Sepahan	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Al Ain	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Sep 15: Al Ain (UAE) v Al Sadd (Qat); Sepahan (Irn) v Al Nassr (Sau)
Sep 18: Al Nassr v Sepahan; Al Sadd v Al Ain
Sep 21: Sepahan v Al Ain; Al Sadd v Al Nassr
Sep 24: Sepahan v Al Sadd; Al Nassr v Al Ain

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Seoul	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Beijing Guoan	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Melbourne Victory	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Chiangrai United	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Oct 19: FC Seoul (Kor) v Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Oct 22: FC Seoul v Chiangrai United (Tha); Beijing Guoan v Melbourne Victory (Aus)
Oct 25: Chiangrai United v FC Seoul; Melbourne Victory v Beijing Guoan
Oct 28: Beijing Guoan v FC Seoul; Chiangrai United v Melbourne Victory
Oct 31: Beijing Guoan v Chiangrai United; Melbourne Victory v FC Seoul

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Tokyo	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Ulsan Hyundai	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Shanghai Shenhua	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Perth Glory	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Oct 16: Perth Glory (Aus) v Shanghai Shenhua (Chn)
Oct 19: Ulsan Hyundai (Kor) v Shanghai Shenhua
Oct 22: Perth Glory v Ulsan Hyundai; FC Tokyo (Jap) v Shanghai Shenhua
Oct 25: Shanghai Shenhua v FC Tokyo; Ulsan Hyundai v Perth Glory
Oct 28: FC Tokyo v Ulsan Hyundai; Shanghai Shenhua v Perth Glory
Oct 31: Shanghai Shenhua v Ulsan Hyundai; Perth Glory v FC Tokyo

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vissel Kobe	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Johor Darul Ta'zim	2	1	0	1	3	6	3
Guangzhou Evergrande	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suwon Bluewings	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Oct 17: Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mys) v Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Oct 20: Suwon Bluewings (Kor) v Guangzhou Evergrande
Oct 23: Guangzhou Evergrande v Vissel Kobe (Jap); Suwon Bluewings v Johor Darul Ta'zim
Oct 26: Vissel Kobe v Guangzhou Evergrande
Oct 29: Johor Darul Ta'zim v Vissel Kobe; Guangzhou Evergrande v Suwon Bluewings
Nov 1: Vissel Kobe v Suwon Bluewings; Guangzhou Evergrande v Johor Darul Ta'zim

GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yokohama F. Marinos	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Jeonbuk Motors	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Sydney FC	2	0	1	1	2	6	1
Shanghai SIPG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Oct 17: Sydney FC (Aus) v Shanghai SIPG (Chn)
Oct 20: Jeonbuk Motors (Kor) v Shanghai SIPG
Oct 23: Shanghai SIPG v Yokohama F. Marinos (Jap); Jeonbuk Motors v Sydney FC
Oct 26: Yokohama F. Marinos v Sydney FC
Oct 29: Shanghai SIPG v Sydney FC; Yokohama F. Marinos v Jeonbuk Motors
Nov 1: Sydney FC v Yokohama F. Marinos; Shanghai SIPG v Jeonbuk Motors

CONCACAF

COSTA RICA Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Deportivo Saprissa (C)	22	13	6	3	41	24	45
Herediano	22	10	10	2	40	21	40
Alajuelense	22	11	7	4	42	26	40
Cartagines	22	10	5	7	33	35	35
Guadalupe	22	8	9	5	28	22	33
Jicaral	22	8	8	6	33	27	32
San Carlos	22	8	5	9	41	41	29
Municipal Grecia	22	8	5	9	33	37	29
Perez Zeledon	22	5	6	11	26	38	21
Santos de Guapiles	21	5	5	11	31	41	20
Limon	21	4	4	13	19	28	16
La U Universitarios (R)	22	4	4	14	27	54	16

Clausura play-offs

Semi-finals

1st legs – Jun. 14; 2nd legs – Jun.17
Cartagines v Deportivo Saprissa 0-4, 3-2 (agg 3-6)
Alajuelense v Herediano 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)

Final

1st leg – Jun. 24; 2nd leg – Jun. 29
Alajuelense v Deportivo Saprissa 0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)

SOUTH AMERICA

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Latest tables. Rescheduled group stage to take place in September-October. Rescheduled knockout stage to take place in November-January 2021.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Independiente del Valle	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Flamengo	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Junior	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
Barcelona	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

Sep 15-17: Independiente del Valle (Ecu) v Flamengo (Bra); Barcelona (Ecu) v Junior (Col)
Sep 22-24: Barcelona v Flamengo; Junior v Independiente del Valle
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Flamengo v Independiente del Valle; Junior v Barcelona
Oct 20-22: Flamengo v Junior; Independiente del Valle v Barcelona

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Guarani	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Bolivar	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Tigre	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Sep 15-17: Bolivar (Bol) v Palmeiras (Bra); Guarani (Par) v Tigre (Arg)
Sep 22-24: Tigre v Bolivar; Guarani v Palmeiras
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Palmeiras v Bolivar; Tigre v Guarani
Oct 20-22: Palmeiras v Tigre; Bolivar v Guarani

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jorge Wilstermann	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Penarol	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Athletico Paranaense	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Colo-Colo	2	1	0	1	1	2	3

Sep 15-17: Colo-Colo (Chl) v Penarol (Uru); Jorge Wilstermann (Bol) v Athletico Paranaense (Bra)
Sep 22-24: Athletico Paranaense v Colo-Colo; Jorge Wilstermann v Penarol
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Penarol v Colo-Colo; Athletico Paranaense v Jorge Wilstermann
Oct 20-22: Penarol v Athletico Paranaense; Colo-Colo v Jorge Wilstermann

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
River Plate	2	1	0	1	8	3	3
Sao Paulo	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
LDU Quito	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Binacional	2	1	0	1	2	9	3

Sep 15-17: Sao Paulo (Bra) v River Plate (Arg); Binacional (Per) v LDU Quito (Ecu)
Sep 22-24: LDU Quito v Sao Paulo; Binacional v River Plate
Sep 29-Oct. 1: LDU Quito v Binacional; River Plate v Sao Paulo
Oct 20-22: River Plate v LDU Quito; Sao Paulo v Binacional

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internacional	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Gremio	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
America de Cali	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Universidad Catolica	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Sep 15-17: Internacional (Bra) v America de Cali (Col); Universidad Catolica (Chl) v Gremio (Bra)
Sep 22-24: America de Cali v Universidad Catolica; Internacional v Gremio
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Gremio v Universidad Catolica; America de Cali v Internacional
Oct 20-22: Gremio v America de Cali; Universidad Catolica v Internacional

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Nacional	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Estudiantes de Merida	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
Alianza Lima	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Sep 15-17: Racing (Arg) v Nacional (Uru); Estudiantes de Merida (Ven) v Alianza Lima (Per)
Sep 22-24: Estudiantes de Merida v Nacional; Alianza Lima v Racing
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Nacional v Racing; Alianza Lima v Estudiantes de Merida
Oct 20-22: Nacional v Alianza Lima; Racing v Estudiantes de Merida

GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Olimpia	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Delfin	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Defensa y Justicia	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Sep 15-17: Defensa y Justicia (Arg) v Delfin (Ecu); Santos (Bra) v Olimpia (Par)
Sep 22-24: Defensa y Justicia v Olimpia; Delfin v Santos
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Olimpia v Santos; Delfin v Defensa y Justicia
Oct 20-22: Olimpia v Delfin; Santos v Defensa y Justicia

GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Boca Juniors	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Caracas	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
Independiente Medellin	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

Sep 15-17: Libertad (Par) v Boca Juniors (Arg); Independiente Medellin (Col) v Caracas (Ven)
Sep 22-24: Caracas v Libertad; Independiente Medellin v Boca Juniors
Sep 29-Oct. 1: Boca Juniors v Libertad; Caracas v Independiente Medellin
Oct 20-22: Boca Juniors v Caracas; Libertad v Independiente Medellin

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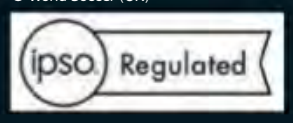


Madrid Derby...ahead of the 2014 Champions League Final

ESTADIO DA LUZ

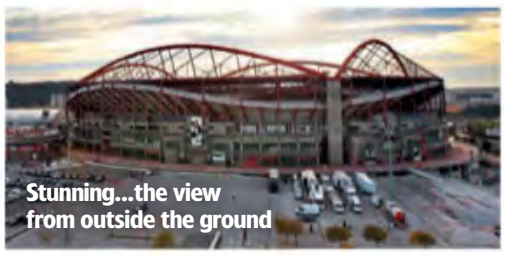
Location: Lisbon, Portugal
Team: Benfica
Built: 2003
Capacity: 64,642

Built on the site of the old 120,000-capacity stadium of the same name, the new Estadio da Luz will host its second Champions League final on August 23.

Originally scheduled to be held at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul, Turkey, this year's final was moved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the 2019-2020 competition's quarter-final and semi-final ties will be played at either Benfica's home ground or at Estadio Jose Alvalade, the home of Lisbon rivals Sporting.

Situated in the Luz neighbourhood, the arena is officially called the Estadio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica but is commonly referred to as "The Stadium of Light" or even "The Cathedral" by local fans.

Voted the most beautiful ground in Europe in a 2014 poll of *L'Equipe* readers, it is the biggest stadium in Portugal and hosts many of the national team's major fixtures.


Stunning...the view from outside the ground

Eusebio...statue of the Benfica legend

Dejected...Rui Costa after the Euro 2004 Final

GREATEST GAMES

2004 June 24
Portugal (P)2-2 England

After Helder Postiga cancelled out Michael Owen's early opener, Sol Campbell's last-minute would-be winner was ruled out for a foul on Portugal keeper Ricardo. Both sides scored in extra time, but Ricardo was the hero in the shootout: first saving Darius Vassell's penalty, then scoring the winner to send the hosts to the semi-finals of Euro 2004.

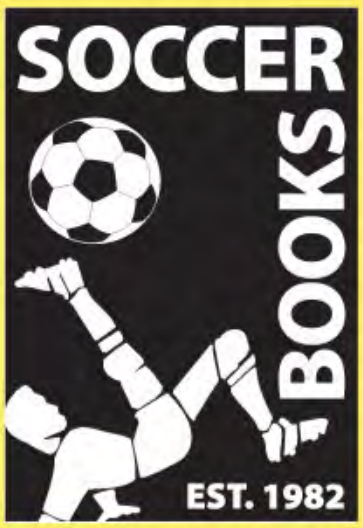
2004 July 4
Portugal 0-1 Greece

Ten days later, Portugal returned for the final. The hosts were huge favourites, despite losing 2-1 to Greece in the opening group game, yet the underdogs upset the odds once again thanks to a 57th-minute goal from Angelos Charisteas.

2014 May 24
Real Madrid 4-1 Atletico Madrid

After Diego Godin nodded them in front, Atletico clung onto their lead until the 93rd minute, when Sergio Ramos equalised. In extra time, goals from Gareth Bale, Marcelo and Cristiano Ronaldo sealed *La Decima* for Real.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE SEPTEMBER 4



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A 688-page yearbook of domestic and international football in Asia during the 2018-2019 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by the 47 Asian countries plus basic information for those who played. For domestic football, this book contains a historical list of champions for each country, a final League table for the past season and information about each National Cup Final. Further details are included about the leading clubs in some of the larger countries as are full line-ups and statistics for the AFC Champions League 2018 and AFC Cup 2018.

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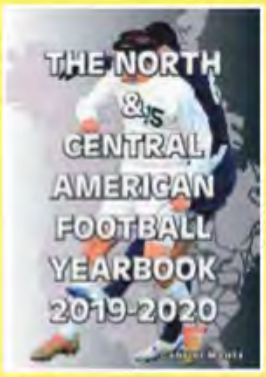

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A 588-page statistical yearbook about South American football during the 2018-2019 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches, a historical list of domestic champions for each country, results of every League game, a final League table for the past season, National Cup Final info and player listings for the top division. Includes full statistics for the Copa America 2019, Copa Libertadores 2018 & Copa Sudamericana 2018.

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